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THE ARGOSY.

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No. 4.

A CAMPAIGN OF STRATEGY.

The story of a game of hide and seek with the Apaches—What followed the burning of Bozeman's ranch—A "crank" photographer and the purpose served by his "folly."

(Complete in This Issue.)

CHAPTER I.—A STARTLING NEGATIVE.

THE pitiless Arizona sun was beating down upon the vast, sandy stretch of plain. The ground, always dry, was parched to tinder, and the sky gleamed as if it were flaming brass. The "bull holes," which nature furnishes to thirsty man and animal, had gone dry, and the spiny cactus was the only vegetable that dared to raise its head in the blazing heat.

And yet there was life in abundance, for alike in the arctic regions and the scorching sands of Sahara, nature knows how to accommodate herself to her surroundings. The rattlesnake, bloated to bursting with venom, crawled through the sand, which was hot enough to roast eggs, or threw himself into a coil upon the approach of an enemy. Innumerable lizards, beetles, and hairy monstrosities wriggled hither and yon, stirred into activity by the crunching sound of horses' hoofs approaching the spot where they lay basking in the fervid rays, which to them was the acme of enjoyment.

Over this frightful expanse a solitary horseman was riding, headed southward toward the Dome Rock range of mountains. He was on his way from Bozeman's ranch to Gannet's ranch, the space between the two being some twelve miles. On every hand, except to the eastward, the cloudless sky shut in the sandy plain, but in the direction named the brown ridge was silhouetted against the heavens.

There are some persons who seem to be born into this world with an incredible insensibility to heat. Where others succumb, they bask in comfort and their skin scarcely glistens with perspiration. R. Field Atwood, as he signed his name, was one of these extraordinary individuals. He was a gaunt New Englander, tall, erect, sinewy, and powerful. He had come from the East only a few weeks before for the purpose of inspecting some of the wonders which are so numerous in the West. On the train he made the acquaintance of Austin Gannet, one of the leading cattlemen of Arizona, and

the two became fond of each other—so much so that Atwood accepted the cordial invitation of the cowboy to spend several weeks with him on his ranch in the southwestern part of Arizona.

Atwood was furnished with a tough little pony, with which he began making his explorations through the unattractive section. His nearest neighbors were the Bozemans and their friends at their ranch, which, as has been stated, lay a dozen miles to the north among the foothills of the mountain spur. He rode thither on the second day after taking up his quarters with Gannet, and made friends at once with the entire party.

There were several causes for this. Atwood was educated, but never attempted any display of his superior knowledge. He was good natured, and knew so well how to accommodate himself to his environments that he was pronounced one of the best specimens of a tenderfoot that had been seen for a long time in that part of the country. He had a weakness, which sometimes caused him to be referred to as a crank. This was a passion for taking pictures of the people, animals, reptiles, and natural scenery of the region he was visiting. He threw out hints about publishing a massive work of views, but added that whether he did so or not, he intended to gather a collection at his home which would surpass anything of the nature to be found elsewhere.

It was not a kodak, therefore, but a small, excellently constructed camera which he took with him on his travels. He was thus enabled to develop his own pictures, and to learn before doing so whether the negative was satisfactory. Many of the views thus gained were unique, instructive, and in a high style of art.

Nothing could quench the enthusiasm of R. Field Atwood. By the time he reached Yuma he had secured a hundred fine pictures. The train making a lengthy stop at that heat baked city, he was naturally interested in the groups of Yuma Indians, who gathered round to sell their bows, arrows, and trinkets. At the suggestion of Gannet, the photographer stepped from the car, and, setting up his apparatus, leveled it at a group of stalwart squaws and bucks. Everything was going along smoothly, when the Indians, understanding his purpose, made a rush for the artist, who would have been badly used and had his property smashed, had he not managed to scramble into the train just in time to save himself. The aboriginal American has a mortal antipathy to having his picture taken.

Austin Gannet was full of sympathy, and expressed his wonder that the red people should have shown such rudeness over a harmless bit of amusement.

"I'm much obliged for your commiseration," replied Atwood, with a twinkle of his gray eyes, "but you put that job up on me, and I shall find some way before long of equalizing accounts between us."

It was two weeks later that Atwood was riding homeward from his visit to Bozeman's. He carried with him his revolver, Winchester, and belt of cartridges, including his small camera. Had he been compelled to choose between that and his weapons, he would have left the latter at home. The apparatus was deftly secured to the saddle behind him, and ready for use whenever the occasion arose.

"Some folks would call this warm weather," he remarked to himself, as if the day were a balmy one in spring; "and I suppose it does deserve that name. I haven't a thermometer with me, but I have no doubt it would mark a hundred and twenty five or thirty. The pony doesn't seem to feel very lively, but I don't understand why the people that have lived nearly all their lives in this part of the world should be eternally complaining about the weather."

Atwood had learned one important fact, since coming to Southwestern Arizona. He was in the land of the unspeakable Apache, the most terrible red men that ever spread death and desolation among the settlements. He knew that Geronimo and his band had broken away from their reservation more than once, and were likely to do so again. The people at Bozeman's had told him strange, horrible stories of their outrages. Gannet himself had related an experience that sounded incredible. He warned Atwood ever to be on the alert, for when the fierce bucks descended it would be like a cyclone. It was because he could not forget this counsel that Atwood, as his horse plodded over the flaming plain, cast frequent glances at his surroundings.

"I suspect that even an Apache would find this temperature uncomfortable," he remarked, after one of these surveys, "and so far as I can see there are no signs of them."

To the westward, behind him and in front, the yellow sand lay in rolls and ridges, and with no other sign of life than himself and pony. To the eastward, rose the mountainous spur, gloomy, desolate, and forbidding, but so far as the eye showed, equally devoid of life. A few miles further and he would arrive in sight of the low, squat building, where Austin Gannet and his hired man, known as Bumble Bee Beebe, made their home.

"This is too good a view to be lost," suddenly exclaimed Atwood, checking his pony with a gentle word; "it must go into my collection."

What there was "good" in such a prospect would have puzzled the most ardent photographer to explain. Perhaps it was its very desolation that made it attractive. Be that as it may, Atwood could not have been more in earnest had he been contemplating the wonders of Yellowstone Park or the magnificence of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. He quickly unstrapped his box-like arrangement, and dismounting, adjusted it on the triangle of supports, hardly thicker than pipestems. His horse was too worn to take any interest in the proceedings, and his master gave no attention to him.

The ridge, which ran nearly parallel with the course he was following, was some two miles distant, affording an abrupt break in the monotony of the windrows of sand. With the abundance of sunlight, despite its palpitating, he ought to have secured a fine picture, and he was confident he had succeeded. Certain it is that he never took greater pains.

When the work was finished, he carefully folded up the apparatus, fastened it to his saddle, and mounted. As he took the reins in hand, he cast another sweeping glance around the horizon and toward the ridge.

"It would be a great improvement to the picture if an Indian or animal showed in the field of vision, and yet it would take away the most impressive touch of nature, for truly it is the home of loneliness and desolation.

Come, Jack, we haven't far to go now, and you shall have a good rest after we reach home."

The pony seemed to understand, for he pricked his ears, snuffed the air and quickened his footsteps. The possibility that there might be some other cause for this than his approach to his home did not occur to the rider.

The sun was well down the sky when Atwood drew rein in front of the small, one story building, where he was in the habit of sleeping. Austin Gannet, brawny, muscular, and powerful, was seated on the shaded bench beside the front door, smoking his pipe and lolling away the oppressive hours. The cattle were scattered among the foothills to the northward, browsing, chewing their cuds in the shade, and brushing with their tails the flies from their bodies. Somewhere, too, in the shade, Bumble Bee Beebe was supposed to be dawdling away the time, most probably in slumber.

Atwood removed the rifle, saddle, bridle, and his apparatus from his pony, and turned him loose, for the animal needed no one to look after his wants, after which the man strode forward and sat down opposite his friend.

"Well, Atwood, did you get any pictures between here and Bozeman's?" asked the cattleman, with a laugh.

"Only one, but that is a beauty. Wait till I wash the plate, and I will show you the negative. You cannot help admiring it."

He passed into the house for a few minutes, in order to prepare the plate. Then when he came forth, he put a dark background behind it, so as to show it almost as distinctly as when fully developed. Gannet studied it only a moment, when he started and excitedly uttered the exclamation:

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

CHAPTER II.—THE HUMMOCKS OF SAND.

AUSTIN GANNET was a man of iron nerve and with a cool head. So rarely did he show excitement, even in the presence of imminent peril, that Atwood looked at him in astonishment.

"It will make a fine picture," he remarked, "but no finer than many others you have seen; so I don't understand why you should overflow with admiration."

"You don't, eh?" replied the cowman, with unabated agitation; "well, when you see what I do in that picture, you'll open your eyes wider than you ever did before."

The photographer leaned over his friend's shoulder and scrutinized the negative again. It was so backed and placed that the most minute features of the sandy landscape were brought out in clear relief.

"There is the desert to the north and south," remarked Atwood, "with the foothills showing as a background. The prospect isn't the most pleasing that I have seen, but it is typical of this country, and therefore interesting."

"I should say so; do you observe off here to the right, between where you stood and the foothills, those hummocks of sand?"

"I noticed them at the time I was taking the picture."

Gannet placed his long bony finger on the picture and counted.

"There are one, two, three, seven of 'em; do you see anything peculiar in 'em?"

"I can't say that I do; I suppose they are the result of the whimsical gusts of wind that blow the loose sand into all sorts of fantastic shapes."

"Well, young man," remarked the cowboy impressively, "when you've lived in this part of the Union as long as I have, you'll understand that under each of those little heaps of sand was crouching an Apache! Seven of them altogether—enough to spread death and desolation over half the country between the Gila and Colorado."

It was Atwood's turn to be flustered. He had not dreamed of anything of the kind, and he knew his friend too well to suspect him of jesting.

"Great heavens! is it possible? Why, they weren't more than a hundred yards from where I stopped, and put up my tripod."

"Exactly, but they was a little to the right of where you reined up?"

"Only a slight distance."

"But enough to save your life; had you rode fifty feet further, you would have tumbled out of your saddle so quick that you wouldn't have knowed what killed you."

"But why wasn't I tumbled out as it was?"

"It was that confounded apparatus of yours that saved your scalp that time; the devils were all ready for you, and I've no doubt that one or two of 'em had covered you with their Winchesters and had their fingers on the triggers, when you puzzled 'em by stopping your horse, dismounting, and setting up that thing; they didn't know what to make of it; when you squinted through the tube and adjusted the lens, you probably scared 'em half to death. They burrowed deeper into the sand, and, if they hadn't been too frightened, they would have jumped up and run for their lives. They couldn't hide the piles of dirt, and had me or any of the boys seen 'em we would have knowed what it meant."

"And yet when I remounted and headed this way, they had just as good a chance to shoot me as at first; why didn't they do it?"

"The most superstitious person that walks the earth is an Injun, and there's none worse than the Apaches. You would think that some of 'em would have knowed what you were doing, and you larned on your way across the plains that an Injin will fight before he'll allow his picture to be took; but it must have been that they didn't understand what you were at. The traveling machines seen out here are kodaks, as they call 'em, but your apparatus is a bigger arrangement, and that's what got 'em."

"Then they must have set me down as a superior being, whom it was useless or dangerous to fire upon?"

"That's just what it was."

"The mistake was quite natural," remarked Atwood, with a laugh, for he looked upon the peculiar incident as finished, failing to see the direful significance in it that was apparent to the veteran at his side; "I suppose they are a party of bucks who could not well restrain their murderous inclin-

ations when there was a chance of shooting a lonely traveler without risk to themselves. It isn't likely that we shall hear any more of them."

"We won't, eh! It seems hard work to get an idea into that thick skull of yours."

There was no mirth in the expression on Atwood's face, as he looked into the countenance of his friend, who rose to his feet. Standing thus before him, the cowman spoke slowly, accentuating each word by a movement of his forefinger.

"Geronimo and a band of the worst Apaches that ever cursed God's earth have made a break and are off their reservation. They are out to steal, burn, and kill, for that is their business; no doubt the United States cavalry are after 'em, but it is like a man of war trying to run down a lot of loons; they are here today; tomorrow they'll be burning ranches along the San Carlos; and by the time the cavalry arrive there, the devils will be well on their way to the Gila, leaving the dead and mutilated for our soldiers to bury, while Geronimo and his band will be scurrying across the country like the wind after more victims."

Austin Gannet thumped his forefinger upon the plate which he still held in his left hand, and announced the climax:

"That's what them seven humps of sand meant!"

Instinctively both glanced across the country in the direction of the flaming waste where the piles of dirt had been, if they were not still present. They could see nothing, however, from where they stood. The building stood among the stunted cedars, rocks and boulders, and when approached from certain directions, it could not be seen until a person was within two or three hundred yards of the place.

But in erecting his flat, wooden dwelling in that part of the world, Austin Gannet was not forgetful of the perils to which he was liable to be exposed. A little way from the structure, somewhat further among the foothills and more elevated, was an immense brown rock, from whose summit an extended view was had of the desert to the north, west, and south. Like most of his profession, the cowman kept a fine binocular in his home, and when there was danger in the air, he spent many an hour upon this rock, carefully studying the country spread before him. By this simple but wise precaution, he saved the lives of himself and friends more than once.

But, after having recourse to this aid, the two men sat down on the shaded steps for a brief, earnest talk.

"Gannet, what is the meaning of all this?" asked Atwood in a hushed voice, looking earnestly into the face of his friend; "it seems to me they are after us."

"We ain't too small game for 'em, when there isn't any bigger within reach; when Bumble Bee comes back, there'll be three of us; Geronimo will reason that there's three too many white men in this part of the world, and he'll try to wipe us out, but he'll give his first attention to bigger game that ain't far off."

"Where is that?"

"At Bozeman's."

"True, why didn't I think of that?" exclaimed the alarmed Atwood; "there are no women here, but at Bozeman's are Al's wife Molly, and her sister, Kate Warren. Probably this band of Apaches know all that."

"There is no doubt of it, and they're planning to kill the women."

"But how can they do that when there are so many to defend them? There is Al himself, Tonto Jack, Shorty Sam, and Bronco Brisbin, to say nothing of that young man Harvey Kingsford, who is expected over from Ehrenburg. They together will make a force that need not fear a band twice as numerous as the one Geronimo has probably taken with him."

"Are they all at Bozeman's?"

"By heavens!" gasped Atwood after an instant's reflection; "these isn't one of them there! Those women are doomed! We must go to their help, Gannet! There's not a minute to lose!"

Now that the fearful peril may be said to have fully developed itself, Austin Gannet became the cool, self possessed man who had passed through a score of dangers unscathed. Apparently he was no more agitated than when lazily smoking his pipe and watching the slow approach of the photographer.

"Don't suspect that I don't mean to strain every nerve to help those poor women, but we must take time to make no mistake. In the first place, tell me how it is that none of the boys is at Bozeman's ranch."

"I stopped there this forenoon and found Al and Tonto Jack at home. Shorty Sam and Bronco were off with the cattle to the northward, and were not expected back for two or three days and maybe longer. Al had received word from young Kingsford at Ehrenburg that he would soon be out to make him a visit, and I could see that Miss Warren was in a flutter of anticipation. Al had heard rumors that a little way to the north and further in among the foothills was a stream of clear water and a big stretch of fine pasturage, which he and Tonto Jack meant to inspect, with a view of making use of it."

"When did they intend to leave?"

"They left while I was there! The women urged me to stay till the men returned, or Harvey Kingsford arrived, and I was half disposed to do so, but there seemed to be no reason why I should; so, after taking their pictures in several different poses, I bade them good by. When I came away the two ladies were left alone."

Austin Gannet's bronzed countenance became pale and he compressed his lips. Those who had seen him in the swirl of the deadly fight had noticed a peculiar gleam of his gray eyes which, somehow or other, seemed to be the glitter of death. That glitter was there now.

"The chances are a hundred to one that Molly and Kate will never see another sunrise, but there is just the one chance that they may."

"What is that?"

"Al may get word of the danger and hurry back home; it may be the same with Sam and Bronco off with the cattle, or Kingsford may arrive soon enough from Ehrenburg to stand off the imps till help reaches him, but you can see that all these chances are mighty slim."

"And what of *us*?" asked Atwood, who, abounding with chivalrous regard for the women and full of true courage, was a trifle impatient with his friend, who talked as if they two were wholly eliminated as factors from the problem.

The cowman made no reply, but stepped into the building and quickly came forth with his spyglass in his hand. He nodded to Atwood to follow him to the huge rock not far off. When they clambered upon it, it almost blistered their hands. Still silent, Gannet raised the instrument and gazed off over the miles of hot, yellow sand stretching to the westward.

His attention was first directed to the hummocks which had told their startling story to him. They were dimly discernible, and he studied them carefully for several minutes before speaking.

"The Apaches are gone," was Gannet's comment.

"But whither?"

The cowman shrugged his shoulders.

"Probably they're somewhere among the foothills, not far from this spot; they left their ponies there while they went out to ambush you."

"Their time was brief in which to get out of sight."

"They had as much time as you. More than likely you had hardly started, when they scurried for the hills—*hello!*"

Gannet had leveled his instrument again when he uttered this exclamation. That which he saw became quickly apparent to Atwood. It was a horseman coming from the westward at full speed, despite the frightful heat and the trying soil. He was riding furiously.

"Can you recognize him?" asked Atwood.

Gannet held the glass motionless for several minutes, during which the horseman rapidly approached. He was coming in a straight line for the ranch.

"Let me try it," said Atwood, extending his hand for the instrument.

Scarcely had he done so when he exclaimed:

"It's Harvey Kingsford! But what the mischief does he mean by coming *here*? We are in no danger; why doesn't he go to Bozeman's?"

"It has a queer look, but we shall soon know."

Meanwhile, the young horseman was thundering across the plain, as if there was no such thing as a sun in the brassy sky, and the earth were not palpitating with fervent heat. The two descended to meet him, and a minute later, the pony, covered with lather and foam, stopped abruptly, and the rider leaped from the saddle in such haste that it looked as if he had been flung out by the sudden stoppage. But he was too good a horseman for that.

CHAPTER III.—"THE APACHES ARE THERE!"

HARVEY KINGSFORD, the young man who dashed up to the foothills in this headlong fashion, was, a couple of months previous, a tenderfoot. It was while making an overland journey to the Pacific coast, that he lost his heart to Kate Warren, on her way to visit her sister, the wife of Al Bozeman.

The acquaintance seemed mutually pleasant, and the young man secured permission to escort her to the little town of Ehrenburg on the Colorado. The ranch was twenty odd miles to the southeast, and when, through some misunderstanding, no one appeared at the town to meet the young lady, it was manifestly the duty as well as the privilege of Kingsford to continue his guardianship to the ranch. The trip was easily made between sunrise and sunset, and the young man was received as hospitably as the young woman. His prepossessing appearance and manners, his skill as a horseman and with rifle and pistol, won upon the cowboys at once. He could not refuse their invitation to spend a week or two with them. In fact, since he possessed the means, he held serious thoughts of entering into the cattle business, the principal occupation of the people in that section.

But the time came all too soon, when good taste forced him to bid his friends farewell for a season. Miss Warren expected to return eastward, when the weather became more bearable, and in making his own calculations, it need hardly be said that the young man assured himself he would be journeying in the same direction at about the same time.

At Ehrenburg whom should he find but an old friend and college mate, who being weakened by pulmonary trouble, had gone thither for the benefit of the dry, equable climate. The poor fellow, however, had waited too long, and Kingsford saw that he was doomed. It was true comradeship that caused him to stay with the grateful invalid, until his life went out like the snuffing of a candle. The friend did everything possible to soothe his last hours. He took charge of his effects, wrote the particulars of his decease to his parents, attended to every want, and finally shipped the body to its home.

Left alone at last, it seemed proper to Kingsford, who had kept Miss Warren informed of his whereabouts and doings, that he should make a brief call upon his old acquaintances before leaving the Territory. He had received several pressing invitations from them, and his reply was that as soon as he could complete all his duties, he would ride over to the ranch and remain for a few days.

Now it was not unnatural that when the ardent lover found himself drawing near the home of the one that was dearer than all the world to him, he should feel some qualms as to the innate propriety of the step. Without analyzing his emotions, let it suffice that because of this diffidence and doubt, he decided to make a change in the direct course he had been pursuing, pause a while at the ranch of Gannet, with whom he had become well acquainted, and ride northward at a more seemly and deliberate pace.

He was yet beyond sight of the ranch, when he descried a single horseman approaching him at a walk from the eastward. Kingsford had been in the Southwest long enough to understand the need of circumspection in meeting strangers, and while yet a considerable distance separated them, he brought his glass into use and carefully studied the man, who changed the course of his pony, as if desirous of joining him.

The result of this scrutiny was the discovery that the man was the hired cowboy or herder of Austin Gannet, who bore the odd sobriquet of Bumble Bee Beebe. He identified Kingsford almost at the same moment and swung

his sombrero above his head in greeting. The other responded and the two were drawing near each other when a fearful thing occurred.

Despite his long experience in the Southwest, Beebe had failed to notice several hummocks of sand, making the very oversight that Atwood did under similar circumstances, although the danger was from another point. He was riding forward at his leisurely pace, when from those same piles of sand several jets of fire spouted and the poor fellow lurched out of his saddle, without uttering a word, dead before he struck the earth.

Had Kingsford been a few minutes earlier, he would have met his friend at the precise point where both would have been shot. As it was, he escaped by almost a hair's breadth. He saw Beebe's pony galloping over the plain, terrified by the occurrence, but not an Apache was in sight. Having delivered their fatal shots, they remained burrowed in the sand, as if they expected the second horseman to ride up and meet his doom in the same manner.

But brief as was the sojourn of Kingsford in the neighborhood, he had learned fast and well. He knew what the death of that single man signified. It was not the result merely of a whim on the part of the miscreants, but meant that a band of renegades, despite the watchfulness of the military authorities, had ridden off the reservation and started on one of their periodical raids of plunder and murder. He could form no idea of their number, but they were usually less than a dozen—numerous enough to spread terror and consternation over an area of several hundred square miles. All the ranches were in peril, for those murderous wretches always struck before the news of their coming could reach all the endangered points. The ranches of Bozeman and Gannet, as well as many others, were in danger, and Kingsford's heart almost stopped beating at the thought of what might befall that home which was his destination.

These fears passed through his mind like a flash, but he made a natural mistake. He supposed several of the men were at home. They were watchful and vigilant, and almost sure to detect the approach of the miscreants, unless stealthily made in the night. Had he suspected the actual truth—that the women were alone—he would have ridden his pony to death, if necessary, to reach the spot in time to give some help.

But he was much nearer Gannet's ranch. Only two men were there. The probabilities were that they could not make a successful defense. Better, therefore, that they should leave, while the opportunity was theirs, and hurry to the help of Bozeman and his friends. If the Apaches chose to run off some of the cattle, they could not well be prevented, but they were not likely to pause to do that, when so much more attractive "game" offered. Nothing less than murder satisfied them, and to that they would give their undivided energies.

One fact, however, was self evident—time was of the first importance. The hot afternoon was drawing to a close, and the suffocating night was at hand. He must not lose a moment in notifying Gannet and Atwood, and securing their help for those who perhaps were unconscious of their danger, a dozen miles to the northward.

Kingsford hated to leave the body of the fallen cowboy where it lay on the baked earth, but there was no avoiding it. If he rode close enough to lift it upon the back of his pony, he would certainly share the poor fellow's fate.

All this and more flashed through the brain of the frightened young man, who, wheeling his animal sharply to the right, buried his spurs into his flanks, and sent him scurrying through the blistering sand, animal and rider alike heedless of the rays that threatened to strike down both.

Three minutes after Kingsford's arrival, he had told them everything, while Atwood hastily imparted his own experience and narrow escape, which, after all, was no narrower than the other's. It was sufficient to stir each heart to its profoundest depths, but the climax came when the photographer announced the woful fact that the two women at Bozeman's were without a single male defender.

"And you are standing here idle!" indignantly exclaimed Kingsford.

"Not too fast, my young friend," exclaimed Gannett, whose feelings, intense as they were, remained under perfect control; "it was only a brief while ago that I found out from Atwood how things stood; we're going to the help of the women, but, if the thing ain't done as it should be, it'll be worse than if it isn't done at all."

"What is there to do except to make all possible haste to Bozeman's? A delay of fifteen minutes may be fatal."

"There's some sense in what you say, and it will take less time than that to get under way. In the first place, your pony is done up and won't be good for anything until he has had a long rest. But I have a spare critter for you, and he's just as good as yours; shift your saddle and traps to his back; Atwood and me'll do the same with ours. Then I had another plan in mind."

"What is it?"

"To leave our ponies behind, while we footed it, keeping among the foothills, where it would be easy to avoid being seen. Out in the open, the devils will be sure to observe us."

"Why not then stick to the foothills?" asked Atwood, favorably struck with the plan.

"The distance is too fur; we should have to pick our way so carefully that we could not get to Bozeman's until late tonight, and I calculate that things will come to a head long before that."

"And if we ride our ponies?"

"We'll make a turn fur out on the plain, where they can't reach us with any of their Winchesters, and then ride like blazes; we oughter be there in two or three hours."

"That's the only thing to do," said Kingsford in his brisk, military manner; "let's not throw away another minute."

In that mild climate, where thousands of people never think of sleeping under a roof during the entire year, the horses of the cattlemen live wholly out of doors. When not in use, their trappings are removed and they are left free to crop the grass among the foothills. They form tempting prizes to the "dog" or vagrant Indians and lawless white men, and every

ranchman counts upon losing a few horses and a larger number of cattle every season.

It might be suspected that some of the Apaches had been prowling in the vicinity and had run off with the horses that were browsing quite near the house, but had they chosen to visit the immediate neighborhood, they would have given startling proof of their presence. They might be approaching, but had not yet shown themselves.

The distance was so brief to where the four animals were cropping the grass or resting from the sun, that the ponies were brought to the house in the course of a few minutes and saddled and bridled. Kingsford quickly changed his equipments from his worn and jaded horse to the fresh one provided by Gannet.

At the moment they were ready to start, Atwood slipped out of the saddle with the exclamation :

"By gracious ! I came near forgetting it."

To their amazement, he quickly emerged with his camera.

"What do you expect to do with that blamed thing?" asked Gannet.

"I expect to have the chances to take a good many fine pictures. Hasn't it done me such a good turn that it is wise to trust it further?"

Kingsford sniffed in disgust, but no protest was made, for each knew it would be useless. Besides, the situation was too serious to think of such trifles. Atwood contrived so as to be able to carry it without being discommoded, and, after the apparatus was fixed to the saddle behind him, it required no further attention.

Gannet, by virtue of his skill and experience, was now the leader, and the others looked to him for direction. The first precaution was to turn sharply to the left, with a view of getting to a safe distance from the foothills, in which a hundred Apaches might have sheltered themselves from the possibility of detection. Not until the three were beyond gunshot, did a feeling of security come over them.

To the astonishment of Atwood, the cowboy headed for the hummocks of sand, whose image in the picture told so momentous a truth. He smiled at the suggestion that some of the hostiles might still be there in hiding. He knew better and he proved it by riding his pony over several, which were tramped under his hoofs. So far as human occupant was concerned, all were empty.

"Will there be a moon tonight?" abruptly asked Kingsford.

"It doesn't rise till past midnight, so it won't help us any."

"There's no saying as to that ; we can't tell at what hour our help shall be needed, though I am almost sure it is *now*."

"We shall not reach Bozeman's until after dark," was the remark of Gannet some time later, as he glanced at the location of the sun ; "we might push our ponies harder but I don't think it is wise."

It will be noted that Gannet gave no attention to his home before leaving. The most that he did was to close the front door. If any of his friends should call during his absence, they would find no locks or bolts to bar their entrance, for every ranchman keeps open house. It would be the same, if

the Apaches made a visit. Inasmuch as the utmost precautions could not shut them out, it would be a waste of time for the owner to seek to obstruct them.

Having circled far enough outward on the plain, the three headed in almost a direct line for Bozeman's ranch. The sun was now in the horizon and the heat seemed as frightful as ever. Despite the strain of the situation, both Gannet and Kingsford felt it, as did all their animals, but Atwood seemed unconscious of the unusual temperature. The ponies were forced to a gallop, but the yielding sand made the traveling difficult, and after a few miles, the animals dropped to a walk. There was danger of the beasts succumbing even under that, and it was the utmost that the men dared to do.

The ranchman kept unremitting watch. His dread was that a large party of Apaches might dash out from among the foothills on their tough animals and assail them. Since the little company were well mounted, there was reason to believe that they could escape an encounter, but necessarily there was no certainty in the matter till the test came.

When night closed in over the desolate scene, most of the journey had been completed. There was a slight abatement of temperature, and Atwood exasperated his grim companions by remarking that it had really become cool and pleasant.

"Gannet," he added, "you must have been mistaken about the moon not rising until after midnight."

"Why?"

"The horizon is growing light ahead of us; it must be the moon."

"The moon has no more to do with it than you," was the grim reply; "it is a burning building."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Kingsford; "it is in the direction of Bozeman's!"

"And it *is* Bozeman's."

"You don't mean to say——"

"Yes, I do; long before morning there will be nothing left but ashes; the Apaches are there!"

CHAPTER IV.—AT BOZEMAN'S.

ON that same flaming afternoon, Molly Bozeman and her sister, Kate Warren, were doing their best to keep partially cool, as they sat under the shade of the front porch. They had completed their household duties, which were light, since all the cooking was done out of doors. The use of a stove or fireplace at this season would have made the dwelling intolerable.

The younger woman was in a flutter of pleasant anticipation over the coming of Harvey Kingsford. Word had been received from him on the previous day, through Bronco Brisbin, who had ridden over to Ehrenburg, so that the young man was expected at any hour or moment. The fact that Kingsford had lingered in that little town for the purpose of attending his stricken comrade, deepened the regard of the hardy cowmen and added a

tenderness to the sentiment with which the comely young woman from the East regarded her handsome cavalier.

"It is greatly to his credit," remarked the elder; "for it proves his goodness of heart. It would be unjust to say that the pretext which it gave him for making another call upon you, Kate, had any weight, and yet," she added with a smile, "I half suspect it at times."

"You do him injustice," the younger hastened to say, with a blush mantling her features, "for no such pretext was necessary; Harvey knows that he is welcome whenever he chooses to come."

"That is true, and yet he is so chivalrous and sensitive in such matters that he left us when he knew we all wished him to remain and he himself wished to do so. It will be pleasant to us all to have him here again——"

The conversation thus fairly began was suddenly interrupted by the appearance of a horseman, who approached the house from such a point that he was not seen until he dashed around the corner and reined up in front of them. He was Bumble Bee Beebe, and his flushed face and manner showed that he was laboring under intense excitement.

"The devil is to pay!" was his startling salutation; "Geronimo and a lot of his bucks are off the reservation and will soon be here."

"And we are alone!" exclaimed Mrs. Bozeman, hastily rising; "what will become of us?"

"They will not be here for several hours; I'll hurry after the boys and bring them here; I shan't be gone long; don't have any fear. If Geronimo should show up, you and Kate can stand him off for a little while. Good by!"

And the excited fellow dashed off again, and, as we know, rode to his death. His judgment must have been warped, else he would not have committed his fatal mistake.

The coming and going of the man consumed such a brief space of time that the sisters looked in each other's face, as if they hardly understood what it meant, and yet it required but a few seconds for the fearful truth to burn its way into their consciousness.

"He has taken the wrong direction," said the alarmed wife; "Al and Jack are among the foothills; he will never find them."

She hurried from the porch intending to call to him, but the impetuous fellow was already beyond reach of her voice.

"It may be hours before any of them come," was her half despairing cry; "though we have a rifle apiece, we shall be able to keep the Apaches at a distance for only a little while. It will not take them long to learn that the house is defended by no more than a couple of women."

"Perhaps they know it now," said Kate. "Oh, that Harvey would come!"

And shading her eyes she peered searchingly across the sun baked plain, but without a glimpse of the form she longed to see.

"He would be of little help; let us pray for the coming of all our friends."

Bozeman's house, like nearly every one in that section, was but a single story in height. Along a portion of the front was a rough piazza, the single door being in the middle portion. The roof was even with the eaves of the building itself, which were not twenty feet from the ground. The rafters extended horizontally along the interior, leaving the slight space formed by the peak of the roof, which at that side was three or four feet higher than the lower eaves. This space was reached by a sloping ladder, while in the roof was a small trap door, through which a person could make his way and gain a view of the surrounding country.

"Let us take a look from the roof," said Kate, hurrying indoors. She caught up the field glass, and a few minutes later they were both on top of the house, at the risk of being prostrated by the terrific heat.

The first scrutiny to the westward disclosed a number of horsemen in the distance, riding toward the ranch. A minute's study was sufficient.

"They are Apaches," said the young woman; "we have no time to lose."

They hurried to the lower floor, closing the trap door after them, and each caught up a Winchester, whose magazine contained fifteen cartridges.

"Kate, watch from the window at the rear, and I will do the same at the front," said Molly.

"Are we to do nothing but watch?"

"Yes, shoot! The instant you can make sure of your aim, fire. If you show any mercy or refrain from shooting, it will be taken as proof of cowardice. You know what it means, sister, to fall into their hands! Better that we should let them set fire to the house and burn us to death."

"Have no misgivings as to my doing all I can," was the calm response of the young woman, who a few months before was a leading belle at a fashionable seaside resort.

It fell to her lot to open proceedings. She had been at her station scarcely fifteen minutes, when her sister called to her.

"Do you see them?"

"Yes; they are a big party."

There must have been a round dozen bucks coming with their ponies on a gallop, a force frightful enough to paralyze two women at the very sight of them. They were riding in a bunch, their heads bobbing up and down in an odd way while every face was turned toward the house. None of them had saddles or bridles. A halter or a single strap served for a guiding rein, and was all that these superb horsemen needed. Thus mounted, they were fit to ride to the death.

The miscreants were half naked. Their chests were bare and none of them wore any head gear. The coarse black hair flapped about their shoulders, and was without feather or any manner of ornament, except from the blue, yellow, red, and white paint that was daubed on the crown, and smeared over the breast and face, the latter being touched up with several white rings and black crosses. Had the wretches spent a week in trying to make themselves look hideous, they could not have succeeded better. They wore breech clouts and probably half had moccasins, the remainder being barefooted. On

one or two wrists were iron or brass bracelets, to which were attached long wisps of horsehair, which fluttered in the wind created by their own motion.

It was evident that the stillness and absence of visible life about the ranch puzzled the hostiles. Did it mean that no one was inside, that the women were huddling together in helpless terror, or that the men were calmly awaiting the moment when the bucks should come within easy range? It was important that this question should be decided before the ball opened.

The Apaches came to a halt some two hundred yards distant. This was for consultation. They were in such clear view that the two women noted their gestures and saw the glitter of their serpent-like eyes, when they looked at the house, which they frequently did.

The decision of the conference was a singular one; one of the hostiles, pointing the head of his pony toward the building, rode forward, with the animal on a walk. The action indicated that he was the leader or one of the leaders of the party. He advanced deliberately, his eyes were centered on the building until he was within a hundred yards of the porch. Then he checked his horse, and his eyes roved over the front.

He was a striking figure. He was not tall, but stockily built. His long black hair hung about his shoulders, and his ugly countenance was ornamented in a most remarkable way. The forehead was gridironed with white and black stripes, the same favorite pattern showing on the cheeks, breast, and wherever space could be secured. When that was lacking, tiny crosses and dots were the style. Each eye was encircled by a white ring, suggesting huge spectacles, but as the mouth was inclosed in the same fashion, it may be said that the horrible face of the Apache resembled only itself.

Like all his companions, the leader held a Winchester rifle across the horse in front of his thighs, grasped with one hand and ready for instant use. In the top of the breech clout was a large knife, and there could be no doubt that more than one of them in that party were already crimsoned with the blood of innocent mothers and children.

The women expected the buck to address them, doubtless with a view of uncovering the strength of those in the building. However, he displayed no flag of truce, so that which followed cannot be said to have been in violation of the law of civilized nations.

While the miscreant sat motionless on his motionless horse, the bird-like flitting of his eyes was noticeable. There was not a square foot of the front of the building which was not rapidly scrutinized. The women could tell when he was looking at some remote points of the house, for then the whites of his eyes showed, while, when only the jet black pupils were observed, he seemed to be staring so directly at them that each shrank timidly back, fearful of being seen.

CHAPTER V.—BRAVE WORK.

At this critical moment, Mrs. Bozeman was startled by the crack of her sister's Winchester almost in her ear. At the same instant the miscreant seated on the pony a hundred yards away, emitted a screech and, throwing

up his hands, turned a perfect back somersault over the rump of his horse, landing flat on his back, while his gun flew a dozen feet from him. The pony scarcely stirred, but throwing up his head, stared at the house and whinnied.

Hardly was the shot fired when Mrs. Bozeman let fly at the group further off. She could not secure a good aim, but she knew from the outcry that she had struck something.

"Keep it up!" she called to her sister, setting the example herself, and straightway the two began pumping bullets at the hostiles with a vigor that two cowboys could not have surpassed. The Apaches galloped back out of range, and came together again for consultation. Their change of base showed that in addition to the dead leader, two ponies had been killed, and there could be no doubt that several of the bucks had been hit hard, though still able to keep upon their steeds.

The spirits of the defenders were raised to a high pitch by the opening success. They hoped that the Apaches, after such a sharp repulse, would haul off in pursuit of those victims who made less resistance; but they were not the ones to retire meekly, when revenge appealed to them. From a considerable distance, they began discharging their guns at the house, and their good marksmanship was proven by the whistling of many of the missiles through the windows, some of them dangerously close to the sisters that were making their valiant defense.

But as the minutes passed, and the party still hovered in the neighborhood, the hearts of the two brave defenders sank with despair. Suppose the Apaches should make a dash for the dwelling? They could batter down the door, or force their way through the windows, and overwhelm the two in a twinkling. Why was it that they did not use the advantage that was in their hands? They could approach the house from either end without coming within range of the Winchesters, and nothing was easier than to set fire to the timber, already as dry as a powder horn. The recourse to this expedient was so plain that it could not be believed that they would let it slip.

Should the assailants discover that the place was defended by only two women, such a rush was sure to follow on the instant. The sisters, therefore, took care not to show themselves, except to the least degree possible when risking a shot. This was only a simple precaution against being hit by some of the bullets that were continually hurtling about them.

A startling shock came to Mrs. Bozeman, when amid the popping of guns, a sharp sting in her shoulder apprised her that she had been wounded. Hearing her cry, her sister ran to her side and made a hasty examination. Fortunately the injury was trifling, hardly any blood showing, but it did much to dampen their ardor, and made them more cautious than ever against exposing themselves to the ever present danger.

Miss Warreu returned to her place on the other side of the room, but was alarmed at her failure to see any of the Apaches. They had vanished as suddenly as if the earth had opened and swallowed them. She called to her sister.

"How many are in sight on your side?"

"Only three."

"Do you know what has become of the others?"

"I saw them start in your direction, but they disappeared round the corner of the house."

"And are there yet; they will not come into sight."

"Which means that they are approaching the building by one of the ends, where we cannot get a shot at them."

"For what purpose?"

"Why do you ask me, sister? There can be only the one of setting fire to the building."

"I wonder that they delayed so long."

But a sudden notion took possession of the younger sister. She was determined to learn, if it could be done without too much danger, what had become of the hostiles that had ridden from sight. The trap door was so near the end of the structure that by lifting it a few inches, she could peep out over the plain, which was invisible from either the front or rear.

It was a dangerous thing to do, for the keen eyed Apaches would be quick to note any carelessness. Mrs. Bozeman urged her not to carry out her purpose, but making light of the peril, she hastily climbed the ladder, leaving her rifle behind, as it could prove of no use to her. The listening sister below heard the light footsteps along the upper floor until they paused under the trap door. Then all became still, but she knew Kate was cautiously raising the door that she might look out. A few minutes of stillness followed, when Kate was heard to let the lid fall and to descend the ladder hastily, as if under renewed excitement.

"What is it, sister?" asked Mrs. Bozeman, looking round at her.

"I can't see a single Indian."

"The three on this side have ridden away; it looks as if there is none in the neighborhood."

"Can it be they have given up the attack?"

"It will not do to believe that; they must have thought there are more people in here than is the fact. They have ridden off to get help."

This was a startling view, albeit a reasonable one. The situation, therefore, became of the most trying nature. It would seem that Bozeman and the other cowmen must have heard the firing, or had learned by the use of their eyes of the danger in which the ranch stood. If so, they were hurrying homeward at headlong haste and ought to be near. And yet there was the possibility that they knew nothing of the peril of the women folks, and might remain absent for hours.

Meanwhile, it could not be believed that the Apaches had withdrawn for good. They had suffered so severely that they were now inspired by revenge—the strongest motive that can incite a red man to deviltry. It was singular that they had not fired the building, when it could have been done at slight risk. Be that as it may, the sisters were wise in deciding that another visit was almost certain to be paid them in a short time. And when their assailants reappeared, the crisis would be at hand.

It will be borne in mind that Bozeman's home, like that of Austin Gan-

net, stood at the base of the foothills of the Dome Rock mountains. To the rear, therefore, the country was rough and broken with boulders, depressions, and elevations. No better hiding place could be desired by red or white men. The difficulty, however, in the former case, was that if the Apaches remained among the hills, they could do nothing more than fire their rifles at long range—a species of attack which could never be effective. Hence, their favorite method of circling about the building, while looking for some means of taking the defenders unawares.

By this time the sun was low in the sky and night was at hand. If the building was attacked in the darkness, it was improbable that the women could hold out for more than half an hour at the most. There would be so many unseen ways of attack, that three times their number could not stand off the merciless hostiles.

Kate Warren suddenly seized the arm of her sister, who looked in surprise into her face.

"Let's leave the house and hide among the foothills," was her startling proposal.

It was such a strange fancy that Mrs. Bozeman was silent for a minute. Then she saw that, dangerous as was the plan, it had its advantages. There were so many places for concealment that if they were once reached, the women ought to be safe.

The one obstacle that caused them to hesitate was the vague suspicion that the Apaches were maneuvering to bring about the very attempt. If so, some of them would be on the alert among the foothills to seize the fugitives the moment they came within reach. It seemed incredible that the hostiles would go away and leave this avenue open without preparing to turn it to account. And yet since the defenders had resisted them so successfully, it would not seem likely that they would take to flight, when the danger had shrunk almost to the vanishing point.

But the sisters might speculate for hours, and be as far from the truth as at the beginning. The one fact was apparent—if they could reach the foothills unobserved, it was the wisest thing to do, and they determined to attempt it, if the way was open.

They walked softly to the rear of the large room which extended the width of the building, and peered cautiously out. The comparatively level space which separated the structure from the first break in the land was hardly two hundred yards distant. It was a brief run across that, but where would they emerge?

Each scrutinized rock, boulder, tree, and slope as narrowly as it could be done in the gathering gloom. Their sight was keen, and the glass could be of no help where the intervening distance was so slight. Look as closely as she might, Mrs. Bozeman failed to discover the slightest sign of life, but that was no evidence that it was not there in abundance. It was the same for a time with her sister, whose scrutiny was equally painstaking. The stillness of the tomb inclosed them, and apparently there was no living person within many miles.

Nervously anxious over the value of the minutes, Kate was on the point

of urging her sister to hesitate no longer, when something caught her eye. In the deepening shadow of the nearest cedar, an object moved. Had she been gazing directly at the spot, she might have been able to identify it, but she was looking at a point some distance to one side, so that it was little more than a slight flutter in her field of vision.

A question to Mrs. Bozeman brought the reply that she had not observed it, and both centered their attention upon the spot. It was easy to understand that the flutter might mean everything or nothing. A watchful Apache would not be likely to betray himself, and it might be that it was only a piece of dead limb that had fallen to the ground of its own weight. And yet a mistake was to decide the question of life or death.

The sisters stood in an agony of fear, unable to decide on the best thing to do. Was it safe to tarry a while longer in the hope that their friends would arrive?

Remembering that the front of the house had been left unguarded for a little time, the elder ran to the door and looked out. The first glance brought a shock that almost took away her breath.

A party of Apache horsemen were approaching on a gallop, and were so near that the men could be readily observed in the gathering gloom.

"We mustn't wait another second, Kate!" exclaimed the elder in dismay; "they will be here in two minutes."

Kate, rifle in hand, ran to the front door, which was partly open.

"Don't leave that way," called Molly; "they will see you."

But Kate did not intend to run out into full view. On the contrary, she brought her Winchester to a level and fired into the galloping horsemen. Her shot was intended to check the tumultuous advance, and it succeeded in doing that, but also accomplished a much less desirable thing. The Indian horsemen fell apart, and spreading out, prepared to circle around the building, as they had done earlier in the day. If the women paused another second, all hope of escape would be ended.

They did not pause. Mrs. Bozeman was the first to gather her skirts about her and climb through one of the rear windows. Her sister was so close that she leaped to the ground almost at the same instant. It was too late now to turn back, and with a muttered prayer the two fugitives sped like a couple of fawns across the brief space toward the shelter of the foothills.

Even though a score of foes might be waiting for them on the edge of the shelter, the two must rush into their arms, for it was impossible now to turn back.

CHAPTER VI.—THE FUGITIVES.

An extraordinary complication followed. Mrs. Bozeman was slightly in advance, but her sister was hardly two or three paces to the rear. The younger was more self possessed, for while Molly bent every energy toward reaching the shelter and did not glance to the right or left, Kate was on the alert for every form of danger. In their haste they had taken nothing with

them except their rifles, each of which held several cartridges in its magazine. They were without a particle of food or extra clothing, and indeed carried only their everyday attire, with their broad brimmed hats.

The fugitives were almost on the edge of the shelter when one of the mounted Apaches, who had set out to circle the building, caught a glimpse of the vanishing forms in the gloom. With a screech of exultation, he headed his pony toward them and rode like a whirlwind.

"Quick!" exclaimed Mrs. Bozeman, with a terrified glance over her shoulder; "don't wait an instant!"

Under the belief that her sister would heed her call, she made a frantic dash for the shelter and succeeded in reaching it. Kate would have done the same, had the space between the two been a single step less, but the Apache was too near. She saw that a collision was inevitable, and if she permitted it to come while her back was to her foe, it meant her death, for it would be the veriest child's play for the mounted devil to strike her down, and it was because of this knowledge, that she did one of the bravest and most thrilling deeds of which there is any record.

Heedless of the prayer of her sister, she stopped short, brought her weapon to a level, and without a flutter of the nerves, looked at the pony surmounted by the crouching demon, his hair flying in the wind created by his own speed; rushing down upon her like a cyclone. It all had to be done in the twinkling of an eye, and pausing only long enough to make sure of her target, she let fly.

The bullet went as true as if directed of heaven itself. In truth, it did more irreparable damage than was intended or expected. At the moment she pressed the trigger, the on rushing horse, possibly actuated by that strange instinct which told him of his danger, flung up his head, as if to dodge the coming missile, with the consequence that he set his brain directly in the path of the bullet, which passed clean through it, as well as through the body of the hideous imp astride his back. Both plunged headlong to the ground, rolling over and "biting the dust" in their last throes.

It was a royal shot, which Al Bozeman or Austin Gannet could not have improved upon, and which sent a thrill through the heart of Kate Warren as she saw what she had done. But there was no time for self gratulation. Other hostiles were certain to be on the ground within a few seconds, and whirling around she dashed toward the point where her sister had passed from sight.

In the flurry of the moment, there was no time for the fugitive to make sure of the precise course she took, nor to call to Mrs. Bozeman, who had preceded her by only a few moments. The one thing was to get among the boulders and rocks where she could find immediate shelter from her enemies. They must have heard the death shriek that followed the discharge of her Winchester, and surmised the cause. Furthermore, she was convinced that a second Apache caught a glimpse of her flying form, as she dashed from the scene of the fatal encounter.

This supposition was right. Had she been less nimble on her feet, he surely would have overtaken her, though, since she still had several charges

at command, possibly it might have proved ill for him, for she had already demonstrated that whoever tried to stop her did so at no little peril. Instead of attempting anything of the kind, the mounted Apache brought his gun to his shoulder and fired at the point where the fugitive was vanishing. Fortunately he had no time to take aim, and his shot was mainly by guess; but, as it was, the bullet whizzed so close to the cheek of Miss Warren that she heard it sing as it sped by.

She glanced around and saw the buck, no longer able to use his horse, bound from his back and dash after her on foot. Instead of halting and firing at him, as was her first intention, she darted to one side, ran a few paces and then abruptly paused, with her back against a huge boulder. In the marvelous atmosphere of Arizona, the air is so clear that the stars shine with a brilliancy never seen in the north. Indeed the star gleam casts a distinct shadow, which, happily for the fugitive, inclosed her entire figure, rendering it invisible to any one unless he came near enough to touch her with outstretched hand.

Standing thus, she had to wait only a minute, when a shadowy figure assumed form in the gloom and approached. She knew on the instant that it was the buck carefully searching for her, but he was depending as much on his senses of hearing as upon that of seeing. Pausing within a rod, he stood still and listened. The starlight fell upon him and clearly outlined his form to Miss Warren, who could make out the stocky figure, the bare chest, and the long, coarse hair dangling about his shoulders, while she was sure she saw the glitter and gleam of his snaky eyes, as they roved over the slight space in his field of vision. His head was thrown slightly forward, and he held his Winchester tightly grasped in one hand at his side, from which position he could raise it to a "dead level" at an instant's call.

The gun that had served the fugitive so well was held with both hands and extended across the front of her body, from which she could aim and fire it as quickly as her enemy. She had no intention of using the weapon except in self defense, and the instant that was necessary, she would shoot to kill. She had lived but a short time in the Southwest, but long enough to know that every white woman exposed to capture by the demons carried a revolver with which to blow out her brains, on the instant that all hope of escape was gone. She never removed her eyes from the dusky figure, but watched his every movement, ready to anticipate his first demonstration.

Suddenly he took a couple of steps forward, directly toward her. The Winchester was grasped more tightly and partly raised. She was ready to fire when he paused again, bent his head in listening, and then advanced, but with such a change in his direction that he would come no closer. It was an unspeakable relief, for it looked now as if the encounter was not to take place.

But the suspense was by no means over. It must be borne in mind that all this took place within a brief distance of the building from which the two women had fled. The Apaches were riding furiously around it, firing their guns, whooping, and evidently trying to taunt the defenders into exposing themselves. They must have known that some of the white people had fled

to the foothills, and the continued silence would soon tell them that no one was left in the house. Hence, the importance of the women getting as far as possible from the spot without a moment's delay.

Miss Warren recalled that there was a well marked path leading from the rear of the building into the foothills, and it was over this trail that the single Apache was making his way, doubtless soon to be followed by others. Nothing was more natural than for her sister to use the same avenue, and she was therefore in danger of being overtaken and despatched by this single warrior. She would be looking for Kate, and was liable to mistake the hostile for her.

"Molly is in more danger than she suspects," muttered Kate, starting over the trail after the Apache, who, if matters were as the younger fugitive suspected, was thus placed between two fires with little danger, however, from either.

The situation could not have been more unique. What seemed quite probable was that others of the hostiles would start over the same trail. To do so, they must fall in behind Miss Warren, who would also be caught between two fires, and be in the gravest peril from both. In other words, the fugitives and the Apaches were likely to be sandwiched between one another, with a fatal collision inevitable.

Mrs. Bozeman did not comprehend all the complications that impended, while her sister did. It was most perilous thus to follow the stealthy Apache along the path, but it seemed necessary for the sake of her sister, and Miss Warren did not hesitate. As she advanced, rifle ready for instant use, she glanced to the rear, as often as to the front.

The brief delay, however, had thrown her so far back that the single Apache was invisible, though liable to appear at any moment. Miss Warren had not gone fifty feet, when she was startled by a slight hissing sound like that of a serpent. It was on the right and very near. Just there the stunted cedars and the huge boulders rendered her eyes almost useless. A furtive look to the front and rear failed to show anything of the hostiles, and she paused, not knowing whether to advance further or to retreat.

The situation could not have been more trying, for she was sure that the buck whom she was following had detected her footsteps, and stepped aside to wait for her, but, while wondering why, if that were the case, he should have warned her of his presence, she was startled by the faintest possible whisper:

"It is I, Molly; step out of the path beside me."

At the same moment, from the gloom a hand was stretched forth and it caught her arm. The younger sister, who had borne herself like a heroine, almost collapsed in the joy of the discovery. Stepping forward, she threw one arm around the form of the elder, and fervently kissing her, murmured:

"Thank God; but where is that Apache?"

"He passed just in front of you."

"How was it he did not discover you?"

"Give Providence the credit, for I deserve none; I had come thus far, when some of my senses returned to me. I did not know what to make of

the report of that gun and the death shriek of the Apache, but I saw that I was getting further away from you with every step I took. Then, too, I dreaded that some of them might follow the path. So I turned off to wait and listen for a few minutes. Had you not come as you did, I should have gone back to look for you, for the sight of the Indian passing over the trail filled me with a horrible dread that you had been killed."

"We have had a fortunate—ah, see that!"

It was the light from the burning building that caused this exclamation. It did not take the Apaches long to learn that no defenders were within, and there was no risk in setting fire to it. They had ceased whooping things up, and firing their guns, since there was no call for anything of that nature.

In the stillness of the night the increasing roar of the flames was plainly heard, and the glare which lit up the heavens reached to where the awed sisters were standing, gazing in the direction of their late home, whose illumination was certain to bring to the spot, sooner or later, Al Bozeman and his men, to say nothing of those at Gannet's ranch. This being the case, it would seem that the best course for the sisters was to stay near the burning dwelling until the coming of their friends; but they feared to do so. The vegetation was so scant that despite the care they took to screen themselves, they were more likely than ever to be discovered by any savages who might be prowling in the vicinity.

"We must get further off," said the elder, in so guarded an undertone that it could not have been heard six feet away.

"It won't do to follow the trail, for we shall meet *him*."

"We will pick our way around the rocks until we are a hundred feet or so further off, and then wait."

"But if that warrior is still searching for us, he will hear us moving about."

"Not if we are careful; come!"

She reached out in the gloom and laid her hand on the arm of her sister, who was in the act of stepping forward, when both drew back, for once more the inevitable Apache appeared. He was returning over the trail, as if suspecting he had passed the fugitive for whom he was searching. If such was his conclusion, he must be aware that the single woman (it will be remembered that he had not seen Mrs. Bozeman) had eluded him by stepping aside from the path, and was doubtless crouching somewhere near by.

Suppose in prosecuting his search, he struck upon the spot where the two were standing, hoping that he would pass them? In that event, they held their rifles at call, and the reader does not need to be reminded that both knew how to turn them to the best account.

But fortunately, at least for the Apache, he held no suspicion, for he glided in front of them like a shadow, with no hesitation or halting, and was instantly lost to view. Waiting but a moment, Mrs. Bozeman said:

"Come; let us use the path while we have the chance."

Without pausing for any protest, she stepped out upon it and hurried deeper into the foothills, while Miss Warren kept near her, continually looking around, and with the feeling strong upon her that this course which

seemed so fortunate, was certain to lead them into trouble, and such unhappily proved to be the fact.

CHAPTER VII.—THE COLORADO CROSSING.

THE moment the full meaning of the glare to the northward broke upon Kingsford and Atwood, they spurred their ponies into a dead run, while Austin Gannet was not behind them. No time now to think of their animals. Even though they dropped dead from heat and exhaustion, they must not be spared. Not a word was spoken during that terrific ride through the hot sand which was flung in showers from the hoofs of their horses. The spurs were dug mercilessly into their sides, and the gallant creatures nobly responded.

A little further, and the thrilling scene burst upon them. The building was wrapped in flames whose glare was reflected against the heavens and the trees and rocks among the foothills on the right. There remained the faint hope that Bozeman and the rest of the cowmen had arrived in time to be of use to the imperiled women, but the awful dread that they had not, held every lip mute.

Onward thundered the tough little animals with a furious energy that required no more cruel mangling of their flanks. Run, brave and intelligent brutes, for never was there greater need of haste. Austin Gannet had forged slightly ahead, for his mount was the best, and he was still going at headlong speed, when he reined up with a suddenness that threw his pony on his haunches.

"*Stop!*" he commanded in such a sharp voice that the others obeyed, though neither saw the cause of the strange order.

"They're coming this way," he added; "down with your critters and give 'em a volley!"

For several minutes the flickering forms of horsemen had been visible, galloping back and forth, revealed in the illumination of the flames, and the keen vision of the leader showed him that several were riding hard to the southward—that is directly toward the three who had come to such an abrupt halt.

"They're going for *my* ranch now," grimly added Gannet; "don't miss, boys!"

The well trained animals required but a few words and a slight kick against their front legs to understand what was wanted of them. Down they went on their knees, and then deftly turned on their sides, while their riders stretched themselves beside them, with Winchesters ready.

"What the blazes are you doing?" angrily demanded Gannet of Atwood, who with incredible coolness was adjusting his camera and tripod.

"What a splendid picture it will make! It is finer than anything I've yet seen."

And despite the disgust of his companions, he completed his preparations. The indignant cowman would probably have kicked over the apparatus, had not the owner, suspecting his purpose, remarked:

"Have no fears; I shall not allow pleasure to interfere with business."

What a striking scene, indeed! In the background were the roaring flames, filling the level plain with the light of the noonday sun. Over the intervening fourth of a mile, between the fire and the dismounted horsemen, half a dozen Apaches were riding furiously straight toward them, with no suspicion of their danger, for the white men were in shadow, while the Indians could not have been more distinctly shown, as they sat upright on their ponies. By and by, when they were nearer, they would catch sight of the prostrate forms, but it would then be too late to save themselves.

The "exposure" of the trap would be hastened by Atwood, who was on his feet behind the tripod, pointing the camera toward the conflagration, with the dusky horsemen apparently cavorting in the flames themselves. The opportunity perhaps was not the best for obtaining a good picture, but the superabundance of light was sure, barring accident, to bring out something.

With a self-possession that was almost beyond belief, the photographer awaited the precise moment, when he clapped the cap over the mouth of the tube. He had caught the view, so far as it was possible to do so. In the same instant, he dropped to the earth and seized his Winchester; and that he had kept his promise not to allow pleasure to affect duty or business, was proven by the fact that he was not only the first man to fire, but when he did so a hideous buck, coming "head on," flung up his arms, and lunged headlong to the earth, as dead as Julius Cæsar.

Kingsford and Gannet were but an instant later, their Winchesters cracking simultaneously, and with the same fatal effect as in the first instance. The Apaches were thrown into a panic—something that rarely occurs with them. It looked as if they had dashed into an ambuscade, where a dozen riflemen were waiting to receive them. Those who escaped the first volley wheeled their ponies abruptly to one side, and circled far out on the plain, flinging themselves over the sides of their steeds, so as to offer as slight a target as possible. The whites sprang to their feet, and began pumping bullets after them as fast as they could fire, but the conditions were so unfavorable that it could not be seen that any further damage was done. It was a stirring encounter, and not the least striking feature was the fact that it seemed to begin and end within a few seconds.

Atwood was detained a brief while to rearrange his apparatus, for whose safety he was concerned, and without waiting for him, Gannet and Kingsford scurried away to the burning structure. Moving forms were in sight, but they had been recognized as Bozeman and his three assistants, Tonto Jack, Bronco Brisbin, and Shorty Sam Bray. The last named was a towering cowboy, six feet three inches in height, so that his sobriquet was in the nature of pleasant irony. They had rushed to the spot upon the first appearance of the fire, and each was mounted on his tough little animal.

As Bozeman and Kingsford rode up, quickly followed by Atwood, the excited group came together. A few seconds sufficed for mutual explanations.

"They were not burned in the building," was the declaration of Bozeman, who thereby lifted an awful load from the hearts of the others, instantly suc-

ceeded by a scarcely less horrible dread that the two women had been carried away captives.

"Why do you speak so positively?" asked Kingsford.

"There can be no doubt about it; neither Molly nor Kate would have remained in the house after it was set afire."

"Would they not have preferred that to falling into the hands of the Apaches?"

"Yes, a hundred times, provided no choice was left to them, but they knew we were not far off and they must have expected us every minute. Had they been killed, we should have found the bodies here, but there are no signs of them."

"We met half a dozen or so redskins, and tumbled three off their ponies."

"You are sure the girls were not with them?" was the anxious inquiry of the stricken husband.

"They were not; the glare of the fire behind them showed each buck distinctly and they made no attempt to carry away the dead bodies even of their comrades. No Indian rode double."

Bozeman and his friends peered to the westward.

"A larger company than usual has broken away from the reservation. Admitting that the bucks that shot Beebe, and came near shooting Atwood, belonged to the main band—and there is no doubt of it—they must have numbered a dozen or more. Half of them sped to the southward, and the others aimed for the Colorado to the west. It must have been the last that took away the women."

"Hadm't you a chance to find out?" asked Gannet.

"No; and that's the queer part of it; when we came hurrying here half the hostiles were galloping off. They were so distant when we first saw them that we learned nothing. It is odd that they should have broken up into two parties."

"What is your explanation of it, Al?" inquired Gannet.

"That the first made off in such a hurry, because they had the captives; they knew the sight of the fire would bring us to the spot, and they didn't mean to take any chances of losing their prisoners."

"And why did the other half of the band ride to the southward?"

"They haven't forgotten that brush you and I had with them two years ago, when we killed two of their best warriors; they intend to pay you a visit."

"That's my idea."

The fact that the two leaders agreed in this conclusion was convincing to most of the others. Yet it was a wrong conclusion, as the reader knows, and had great influence upon the incidents that quickly followed.

The conviction was strong in the minds of Bozeman and Gannet that the half dozen hostiles galloping off toward the Colorado took with them the two sisters, who had been left in the imperiled building. That being so, manifestly not a minute should be lost in pushing the pursuit with all possible vigor. It was a hard thing to do by starlight, and the pursuers were liable to go astray, but it is under such circumstances that the veteran plainsman proves

his subtlety and fine training, and proceeds, as may be said, on general principles. That is, instead of attempting the impossible task of trailing the hostiles, they decided that they were heading for a well known crossing of the Colorado, a favorite with the Apaches, who had used it from time immemorial. Disregarding all other theories, therefore, the cattlemen would make for the same point at the highest speed, and undoubtedly would reach it ahead of the renegades. In that event, they would have time to prepare for the coming of the redskins and give them a reception which Bronco Brisbin well described as decisive and "rattling."

Like the majority of theories formulated under similar circumstances, it sounded reasonable in its features, and yet there were two men in the party who held grave doubts. They were Harvey Kingsford and R. Field Atwood.

"Suppose you are mistaken?" suggested the young man to Bozeman.

"It will be fatal and irremediable," he replied with a compression of his thin lips, "but no more so than if we stay here without doing anything. We can't avoid taking desperate chances. I begrudge every moment's delay."

"It occurs to me," said Atwood, "that some of the Apaches may have fled into the foothills with the ladies; the chance would be so good of making pursuit hopeless that they must have seen it."

"I have thought of the same thing; it may be possible, but is very improbable—so much so that I shall disregard it."

"Why not act upon both of the theories?" asked Kingsford.

"How?"

"Let Atwood and me search among the foothills, while the rest of you make for the crossing of the Colorado."

"There can be no objection to that, for we shall be strong enough to take care of the main party, but it is only right that I should tell you I do not believe you have one chance in a thousand of success. Besides, if there are any of the devils in there, they'll put you in a hole where you'll stay."

"If Atwood is willing we will take the chances."

"Nothing can suit me better; I shall be sure to obtain some valuable views——"

"Come, boys!" interrupted Bozeman, with military brusqueness; "let's be off; good by and good luck to you."

It was evident from his manner that he placed no hope upon the scheme of Kingsford, for, had he done so, he would have offered him valuable suggestions.

The delay beside the building, which was not nearly consumed, was briefer than would be supposed from our account of it. Bozeman, Gannet, Tonto Jack, Bronco Brisbin, and Shorty Sam lined up beside one another, with the noses of their ponies pointed to the westward. They were five as brave cowmen as ever coursed over the plains of Arizona and New Mexico, and never were they more resolute than now. Each had his Winchester and revolvers, and if they should come in collision with a party of hostiles, the

fur was sure to fly. At a word from Bozeman, each man pricked the flank of his animal with his spur, and they were off.

The reflection from the destroyed building which had reached far out on the plain, was much more shortened, so that the five horsemen, whom their comrades surveyed with peculiar interest, were soon swallowed up in the gloom. The thumping of their ponies' hoofs continued for a few moments longer, but that, too, speedily ceased, and Kingsford and Atwood were left alone.

CHAPTER VIII.—A NEW PARTICIPANT IN THE PROCEEDINGS.

THE two tenderfeet, as they would have been called a few weeks before, realized in its fullest sense the difficult and dangerous task they had essayed.

"We may be wrong," said Kingsford, "but to my mind the chances are as good as for Bozeman and his friends. Anyhow we shall take them. What is your idea of the situation?"

"It struck me while Bozeman was talking, that since the Apaches knew the cattlemen would soon be here, they could not fail to see the advantages offered by the foothills as a hiding place. I never saw such a sudden beginning of rough ground. What would be easier than for a party of those imps to catch up the women and dash into the foothills?"

"Could they not use their ponies?"

"Yes; so long as they kept to the trails, some of which are well marked; I have taken several views there, so that I am quite familiar with the ground."

"I remember something of it, but my knowledge cannot help. I am convinced, however, of one thing," added Kingsford, lowering his voice and glancing around, as if afraid of being overheard. "If any of the Apaches took to the foothills, some of them are watching us this very minute from that direction."

"It's safe to bet on that," replied Atwood, with an uneasy glance over his shoulder.

"And therefore it won't do to begin our pursuit from this point; we must mislead them as to our purpose, else there will be no earthly chance of success."

"That is easily done; we will ride to the southward, as if we meant to return to Gannet's ranch; when far enough away to throw them off the track, we shall return and begin the work in earnest."

The two had remained mounted from the moment of their arrival. They turned their animals about and moved off at a walk, so that they were really doubling upon their own trail. The fear of a treacherous shot from the foothills caused them to keep well away from them, as they had done from the first.

The ponies kept so near each other, that the toes of their riders' boots almost touched. When they spoke it was in whispers, for there was no saying in what shape danger would appear. They peered into the surrounding

gloom, scanning every shadowy object that came in sight. They were beyond the decreasing circle of light thrown out by the dwelling which was now being rapidly reduced to embers and dependent wholly upon starlight and the sagacity of their ponies, which many a time has saved the life of their masters. A fourth of a mile was far enough to go, and Kingsford was on the point of turning his pony to the left, in order to approach the foothills, when the animal snorted and made so sudden a leap to one side that he came near unseating his rider.

The cause was at once apparent to the two men: one of the Apaches that had been shot from his horse lay stiff and motionless where he had fallen.

"I think that was my game," coolly remarked Atwood; "if the sun were only shining, he would make a fine picture for my collection."

"Dismiss all such thoughts from your mind, if you expect to be my companion," was the impatient response of Kingsford. The two were approaching the foothills, which now lay a short distance to their left.

"I have no intention of dismissing the subject from my mind; I am too fond of securing pictures; in fact, that's the principal object of my visit to this God forsaken country."

"Do you intend to take that apparatus with you, after we are forced to leave our ponies behind?"

"Most certainly."

"Then we part company."

"As you please; I cling to the camera," and without the least evidence of anger, Atwood changed the course he was following, so that a few minutes later, the two friends were invisible to each other.

"Was there ever such a crank?" muttered Kingsford, when he found himself alone. "He is brave, a fine shot, and an excellent horseman, but that fad of his would surely get us both into trouble and spoil any plan. It is just as well we should part, though it makes the venture of each a quixotic one."

At the foothills Kingsford dismounted. He left the trappings on his animal as he turned him loose, removing the bit so as to allow him to crop the grass. Thus it came about in this strange business that Harvey Kingsford found himself wholly alone in the search he was about to make for the missing women. Judged by the ordinary rule of probabilities, it would be said that there was not the remotest chance of his success, and yet who shall forecast what is to happen in human affairs?

At any rate, there was no lagging in his footsteps. Turning his face northward, he walked rapidly along the foothills until once more he was close to the destroyed building. The mass of embers threw out only a dull glare that hardly reached to the rocks and stunted vegetation where he halted. If any of his enemies were prowling in the vicinity, Kingsford had no fear of being seen.

He recalled that a clearly defined trail led from the rear of where the house had stood into the foothills, and that as it penetrated that rough region, it was crossed by others which showed less plainly. It was the former along which he meant to push his vague search, and it was over that, as the reader

will remember, that Mrs. Bozeman and her sister made their way, after their narrow escape from the Apache pursuer. And so, after all, it looked as if the young man was more likely than any one else to become involved with the fate of the fugitives.

Kingsford was in the best possible fighting costume. His clothing was light, and he carried a fine repeating Winchester and an excellent revolver. Around his waist was his cartridge belt, while his trousers were tucked into the tops of his boots, and his hat was of the broad brimmed variety so popular among the cowboys of the Southwest.

Although unaccustomed to matching his wits against the subtle Apache, Kingsford could not have done better had he received several years of training. The first indispensable requirement was silence and caution. When, therefore, he struck the well remembered trail, made sacred by the sweet associations connected with it, he moved over it like a shadow. The Apache himself could not have trodden the ground with more perfect noiselessness.

The mistaken supposition of the young man was that the assailants were so numerous that half a dozen had plunged among the foothills, taking the captives with them. If such were the fact, he might well ask himself by what possible means he could rescue them or ameliorate their condition, but youth is ardent and hopeful, and where the heart is concerned, mountainous obstacles become only pebbles in the path.

With his mind active and all his senses alert, Kingsford pressed onward until he paused at a point where the trail was intersected by another at right angles. He remembered it well, and the problem which checked him was whether to keep directly on, or to take one of the paths to the right or left.

Reason suggested that he should maintain the course he was pursuing, since that was the most direct route into the foothills, though each of the others curved around so as ultimately to lead in the same direction; but, before doing so, he had resort to a piece of strategy of which he had read and heard, though never until now had he occasion to put it to a test.

Kneeling down, he pressed one ear against the ground, which, as every one knows, is a better conductor of sound than air. The result was startling. He heard faintly but distinctly the noise of some one walking lightly over the trail near him.

Kingsford was flustered for a moment, for he could not locate the sound definitely enough to decide the direction from which the stranger was advancing, if indeed he was not going away from him. Fear of the last being the case, led Kingsford to press his ear to the ground again. The faint noise was louder, proof that the man or woman, whoever it might be, would speedily reach the spot where the young man was crouching. The latter decided that his position was favorable and retained it. At the same time, he drew his revolver and held it in his right hand, ready for instant use.

The act required but a few seconds, but the precaution was not taken a moment too soon. Being partly extended on the ground, his position could not have been more favorable, for he was not likely to be seen by any one approaching, while he himself could plainly make out the other because his

body would show against the brilliant starlight. It was because of this that Kingsford discerned the form of an Apache buck coming like a shadow over the main trail, as if he intended to tread the white man under his feet. And not only did Kingsford see the dusky miscreant, but incredible as it may seem, recognized him.

When but a few paces away, where the star gleam struck him fairly, he stopped and partly turned his head, as if to look behind him. This brought his profile into clear view. The hooked nose and retreating forehead and chin belonged to an Apache vagrant, whom Kingsford had often seen at Ehrenburg. He had made the redskin many presents and employed him to do odd jobs connected with the nursing of the failing invalid. Thus the two became well acquainted, and the young man fancied there was a feeling akin to friendship between them. Rather it should be said that there *had been* such a sentiment, for now the presence of Alkus, as he was called among these merciless renegades, left no doubt that he was as vicious a wretch as Geronimo himself.

Whether the Apache suspected some one was to the rear of him cannot be known, but it is certain that he had no thought of the individual in front. The first knowledge of his danger came when he saw a white man silently rise from the earth before him, as if shot upward by machinery through an opening in the ground, and that same man held a leveled revolver in his right hand, pointed straight at the painted visage, while from behind the weapon came the low words:

"If you stir or call out, Alkus, I'll shoot you dead!"

The words were startling enough to frighten even an Apache. He recoiled a single step, with the involuntary upward movement of his hands, one of which grasped a Winchester fully as good as that carried by his master, whom he was also quick to recognize in the vivid starlight.

"It is my brother, Kingsford," he said in English.

It was no compliment to Harvey Kingsford thus to have kinship claimed by an atrocious Apache, but he was wise, and the possibility of turning this sentiment of friendship, feeble though it might be, to his own purposes, restrained him from repelling the proffer of it.

"Why are you here, Alkus?" he sternly demanded.

The Apache knew the meaning of the question, and was quick with his response:

"I did not wish to come, but Geronimo make me come with him."

"How could he make you do so, when he was a long way off on the reservation?"

"He send me word that if I do not join him, he will kill me; so I go to save my life, though I do not like it."

Kingsford suspected there was truth in this declaration, though it was no excuse for Alkus joining the renegades. It was not his purpose, however, to argue the question with the fellow, nor to call him to account for what he had done. More important matters were at stake.

"Why are you here, among the foothills, when the rest of your friends have gone?"

"I followed the women; they fled into the hills."

This was the first definite information Kingsford had received, and it awoke a thrilling hope in his breast.

"You say they fled to these hills; do you mean they did so without being the prisoners of your people?"

"That is it; they went alone; they had no company but their guns; the younger woman shot Jervos, who tried to follow and take her prisoner."

This was too astounding for belief, and Kingsford could not credit it until the whole story was told. That, in substance, was that Geronimo and a number of his hostiles (and Alkus unblushingly confessed that he was one of the number) attacked the ranch building, supposing that Bozeman and one or two men were there. At any rate, the reception of the assailants was so hot that they drew off for reinforcements. These arrived toward night, when seeing there was no hope of making a successful defense, the women fled into the foothills. They were seen by one of the horsemen, who dashed after them, but he was shot from his pony by Miss Warren, who, having paused for a minute, turned and fled after her sister.

It will be perceived from the story told by the Apache that it contained a good deal of truth. Moreover, it sounded so reasonable and was so far in accordance with the yearning wish of Kingsford that he credited it.

And so after all, it was the blessed truth that neither Mrs. Bozeman nor Miss Warren had been carried away by Geronimo's band. Not only that, but by the exercise of judgment, coolness, and bravery, they had reached the foothills without harm.

The rebound from mental torture to the most buoyant hope was so great that it was hard for Kingsford to restrain himself from shouting aloud. It was because of the roseate hue which immediately tinted the future that he failed to suspect the depravity of the miscreant before him, who, by his own confession, was one of the worst of the band of devils desolating Southwestern Arizona.

The young man would have been justified in shooting down the wretch whom he had covered with his pistol, for when an Apache is on a raid (and sometimes when he isn't) he deserves no more consideration than a rattlesnake in coil, with which reptile he has been aptly compared. But Kingsford recalled his numerous pleasant meetings with Alkus in Ehrenburg, their frequent talks, and the money he had given the redskin. True most of this went for whisky, but the fellow seemed all the more grateful on that account, and appeared to have a real fondness for the generous white man.

It was because of these facts, but more perhaps because of his own buoyant hopefulness, that he made the mistake of deciding to trust Alkus, believing that he could make a loyal ally of him.

CHAPTER IX.—EXIT ALKUS.

ALKUS the Apache was as cunning as Satan himself. Having taken the position that his dread of Geronimo's vengeance forced him to join his band, he did not deny that he entered upon the raid with all the vicious energy of

his nature. He was one of those who galloped about the house of Al Boze-man, firing whenever a chance presented itself, and often when he knew his shots could have no effect.

Had he pretended to any other course, he knew he would not be believed. It was not true that Geronimo, with all his devilish disposition, had compelled Alkus to join his raiders. He merely notified him where and when he could meet him, and the miscreant wanted nothing more in the way of inducement.

Kingsford now cut closer with his questions.

"You started in pursuit of the two ladies who took refuge among the foothills; did you intend to kill them?"

"No; I meant to make 'em prisoners; I knew it would please Geronimo, and I meant to hand 'em over to him, for he loves white women."

"The fiend! I have heard as much; then, if you had found the ladies, you would have done nothing more than make them prisoner?"

"Geronimo wished me to bring them to him; that is all I'd've done."

This sounded so reasonable that Kingsford was disposed to believe it, and yet Alkus had told him a falsehood.

"It looks strange to me, that you should be the only one of the whole party to follow the women; why did not more of your people do so?"

"Geronimo meant to send them, but he kept his bucks near him to help destroy the house; he could spare none till that was done. He thought there were several men inside, but," added the Apache, with a grin which was so expansive that it could be seen in the starlight, "no one was there."

"When he learned that, why then did he not send some of his men to help you?"

"Before he could do so, the white men came, and the chance was gone."

Here was another shrewd fiction, which unfortunately Harvey Kingsford credited, and allowed to influence his course. The view taken by the young man was that while Alkus was ready to go to any length in crime with his old comrades, he really had a fondness for him, caused mainly by gratitude for numerous favors; and furthermore, that that fondness could be turned to good account.

"Alkus, Geronimo and the rest of your friends have fled; several have been killed, and I am glad to say I had a share in that business. They will not come back; the cavalry are already after them; these men will be punished when brought to the reservation; you will fare the same unless you become my friend."

"Alkus is the friend of his white brother."

"I mean more than that; I want you to help me find these two poor women who are hiding somewhere among the hills, with no knowledge of what has taken place within the last half hour or so; if you do this, I will see that General Crook learns it all, and he will treat you kindly; will you do it?"

It has been said that Alkus was wonderfully cunning. Had he greedily

accepted this proposition, it would have caused distrust in the mind of Kingsford, and the wretch knew it. Kingsford had lowered his pistol, and the buck bent his head seemingly in deep thought over the proposition just made to him.

"General Crook is a good man."

"There is none better, and he will keep his promise."

"He speaks with a single tongue; you will tell him?"

"Be assured that I, too, will keep my pledge; I will intercede for you, and you need feel no fear."

Alkus was discreetly silent for a moment, as if weighing the important matter in his mind. Then he said eagerly:

"It shall be as my brother wishes; Alkus is his friend; he will help his brother to find the white women."

"And if we are fortunate enough to find them—what then?"

"He will help to guide them to their friends."

"That's what I wish you to do; you understand traveling through this country better than I. Where were you going when I stopped you?"

"I was making haste out of the foothills; I heard the firing of guns and the shouts of men; I knew Geronimo was going away; I was hurrying to find a pony, that I might go after him while there was time."

"Then you had given up hope of finding the women?"

"Yes, they are gone," said the Apache; "and Alkus does not know where to look for them."

"Nor do I, but there is more chance of two finding them; so turn about and lead the way further into the hills."

Harvey Kingsford was imprudent in trusting this miscreant, but he was not imprudent to that extent as to place implicit faith in him. He believed he would assist him, but at the same time he meant to watch his actions until the supreme test should come. By ordering him to turn back over the main trail, he still held him at command. Had the situations been reversed, the Indian would have been the master.

Alkus, however, obeyed with such promptness as partly to dissipate the growing misgivings of the white man. Once more he moved along the path with the slow, silent tread he had shown from the first, and with Kingsford keeping his place close behind him.

Meanwhile, the young man was thinking. Believing, as he did, that the sagacious women had succeeded in fleeing to the foothills in time to get beyond reach of the Apaches, he wondered what they would next do. They could not fail to know that the light of their burning home would bring rescuers to the spot, and that it would be safe for them soon to go thither; but, since they had been followed into their refuge, they must believe that the danger would continue for hours, probably until daylight, when the way would open for them to communicate with their friends. If they could be certain that the Apaches had fled, and the men had come in their place, the matter was simple, though not without its danger, since there was one of the bucks, if not more, whom it would be necessary to elude before passing out of the rough, rocky region.

It was not too far to the point beyond which Kingsford had never passed when taking his strolls with Miss Warren. Thenceforward the country was strange to him. But the change was slighter than he expected to find. The trail wound among and around the boulders, sometimes in plain sight, then hidden by shadows, but all the time ascending as it approached the more elevated region.

Alkus led the way, as if the man behind him were Geronimo or Cochise, not once looking back, and satisfied that his ally would attend to every duty from that point. Presently a light to the left appeared in the sky.

"Another burning home," was Kingsford's reflection, "though I don't know who it is that lives in that direction—ah! who would have thought it!"

He was surprised indeed when he saw the full round moon mounting the unclouded heavens. The hour was later than he suspected, and henceforth they would have fuller light to guide them in their search.

Suddenly Alkus stopped, raising his left hand as a signal for his companion to do the same. The Apache did not look round, but evidently his keen ear had heard something. Kingsford had not done so, but, as he listened, a faint tremulous whistle, like the call of some night bird, fell upon his ear. He would have believed it was that, but for the action of his guide.

To his amazement, Alkus emitted precisely the same signal, as if in answer to the other.

"Why do you do that?" demanded the suspicious young man.

"To turn them aside."

"Who are they? Apaches?"

"I cannot say; I think Geronimo and some of his young men fled into the hills; they knew I had done that and are calling to me."

"But if they hear your signal they will come here; we must not wait."

"They will know I am in the main path; that I am not looking for any one; that I am going home."

"It may be as you say, but I'm blessed if I can understand your reasoning; lead on and, Alkus, *don't make any more signals.*"

The incident added to Kingsford's uneasiness. Now that the first flush of his exuberance of hope had passed, he was beginning to ask himself whether he had not done an exceedingly foolish thing in thus admitting Alkus to his confidence.

"There are other Apaches among these foothills, and he has some sort of an understanding with them. He is treacherous and will betray me when the first chance offers."

This truth being established, Kingsford's situation became as uncomfortable and trying as it is possible to picture. "How shall I rid myself of the imp?" was the question he asked himself, for he no longer doubted that such riddance was necessary to his own safety.

"There is one way of doing it," thought the young man, as he laid his hand upon the revolver at his hip.

Nothing could be easier than to whip out the weapon and slay the fellow,

who richly deserved death, but there was something so repugnant in shooting down even the vilest scoundrel in that manner that it could not be considered, Kingsford could not do it, and yet he kept his hand upon his smaller weapon. A strange presentiment that he was likely to need it caused him to be ready to draw it like a flash. So long as he kept this up, the most vigilant enemy could not "get the drop" on him.

All at once and without the slightest warning, the whistle that had first alarmed him, sounded from a point to the right and not more than a hundred feet distant. It was as Kingsford suspected; an enemy was approaching, summoned by the signal that Alkus had made. There was a full understanding between them.

The Apache had again halted, with his head bent slightly forward. Kingsford enraged beyond self control, exclaimed in an uncautiously loud voice:

"You are lying to me, you infernal——"

Alkus whirled on his feet with the suddenness of lightning, and with his huge, frightful knife, which was snatched out while turning, he made a bound at the white man, the embodiment of inextinguishable hate and ferocity. He did not speak or utter a sound, but a cat o'mountain could not have been quicker in its movements.

He was so near that Kingsford would have been caught off his guard and borne to the ground, but for the fact already related. A growing suspicion caused him to place his hand on his revolver, and it was half drawn while uttering his reproof. The pistol was fired, while the savage was in air as may be said, and when he went down he stayed there.

CHAPTER X.—A MEETING.

HARVEY KINGSFORD did not forget for an instant the signal betraying the fact that the allies of the treacherous Alkus were sure to be on the spot within a few seconds. Leaping over the body, he ran with the speed of a deer for several rods along the trail, keeping to the course he had been following, then bounding to one side, hurried a few paces further and crouched under the shadow of an immense boulder.

His quickness saved him, for the crack of the pistol and the smothered shriek of Alkus had apprized his friends of what had taken place, and they rushed thither, arriving at the same instant that the fugitive vanished.

Kingsford heard the noise of their feet, for it was no time for caution, and the muttered exclamations when they came upon the scene and saw how it had resulted for their ally. They must have suspected the shot was fired by one of the women, who must therefore be near at hand. Indeed, there had been no time for them to flee far, and since the Apaches came from the direction of the plain the fugitives must be ahead of them.

With scarcely half a minute's pause, the renegades walked briskly over the trail in the direction taken by Kingsford. As they did so, the moonlight fell upon them, and from his hiding place he saw in turn each member of the frightful procession. There were three of them, walking with heads thrown

forward, their coarse hair dangling about their shoulders, the picture of alertness and avenging hate.

Kingsford had met the notorious Geronimo several times; and it was with strange feelings that he recognized the leader as that famous chief who has for years been a "good Indian," but who had now become one of the worst miscreants that ever left a trail of death and woe in his raids in the Southwest.

"What a pleasure it would be to send you to join Alkus!" muttered the young man, hardly able to restrain his itching fingers from raising and firing his revolver, for the intervening space was so brief that the smaller weapon was better than the larger; "but three are too many for me to attack and there may be others near; perhaps we shall meet again."

The dusky trio were gone while these thoughts were in the mind of the crouching fugitive. As they passed from view, they broke into a loping trot.

"It won't take them long to learn that the man they're looking for has slipped aside, and they will begin a search in these parts. My quarters are likely to prove too warm, and I'll change them while I have the chance."

It was delicate work, and he set about it with an extreme of caution that permitted no undue haste. He was obliged to pass over several spaces a number of feet in extent, illuminated by the bright moonlight, and where he must have been seen, had his enemies been near, but they were not, and once more he nestled down beside a friendly boulder, where he felt comparatively safe from detection.

It is at such times that a man in hiding has to learn to restrain his curiosity. When Kingsford heard the guttural words of the three who had returned from their vain search and knew they were not far off, the temptation was strong to rise partially to his feet and survey his immediate surroundings; but it might undo all the good work that he had done. He therefore lay motionless until perfect silence came.

Even then he did not intend to be indiscreet. The action of Geronimo and his companions proved that they knew the person for whom they were searching had escaped for the time by leaving the path. It was not unlikely that it was a part of their cunning scheme to nurse the belief that they had abandoned the spot altogether, thus inducing the fugitive to betray himself.

Instead of doing this Kingsford began a long and laborious circuit, intended to bring him back to the trail at so remote a point that he could follow its windings with no fear of the particular trio that had come so near capturing him. This was a delicate task, for the moonlight was against him and he was unfamiliar with the section. He was not only liable to go astray, but was exposed to the danger of betraying himself by a misstep.

"Those fellows can hear as keenly as so many wild animals, and if my foot should slip——"

Just then a stone turned under his weight and he fell on his side with a crash which it seemed to him must have been heard a hundred feet away. Instead of leaping up and breaking into a run, he braced himself for the encounter that he believed inevitable, holding revolver and Winchester ready to use the instant the necessity came.

But as the minutes passed without sight or sound of his enemies, he

asked himself whether it could be they were so distant that they had not heard the noise. It must be that, or possibly they were carrying out some scheme which he did not understand.

He was too wise to remain in the dangerous spot, and resumed his cautious withdrawal until he had gone so far that he felt safe against discovery. The sound of murmuring water caused a brief search, when he came upon a rivulet trickling from the rocks and flowing eastward toward the level plain. Kingsford knelt down and took a deep and refreshing draft. It was a long time since he had eaten any food, but he felt no hunger, which is less troublesome in a hot climate than is thirst.

Matters were now in that shape that he paused to ask himself what the next step should be, and whether he could do anything for the women for whom he was searching. That they were somewhere among the foothills he did not doubt, but whether near or far from him it was impossible to determine. He dared not call or signal to them, for he would be sure to attract the attention of enemies. The night was well along, and it looked as if he would have to wait until daylight before continuing his search.

He was in this perplexity of thought when he was startled by a shadowy movement of something near him. Believing that some of the Apaches had traced him to the spot, he whipped out his revolver, ready to fire the instant the peril should develop itself.

With feelings that perhaps may be imagined, he saw the next moment the forms of Mrs. Bozeman and Miss Warren walk forward out of the gloom and bend over the place where the water dripped from the rocks.

"Good evening," he said in a guarded undertone; "I hope you are both well."

They started and looked around. Who shall picture their relief and delight at sight of the young man who walked toward them with extended hand? It was like a dream, and for the moment they were speechless with amazement; but when he had clasped each hand in turn in his own warm grasp they realized the blessedness of it all. To them the perils and trials were at an end.

A few minutes were sufficient for an exchange of experiences. The escape of the women had been most extraordinary. From the division and work of the hostiles, it was clear that Geronimo's band was more numerous than was generally the case. Some of his fearful work has been done with only six or eight renegades, but in the present instance he must have had double that number.

The distress of Mrs. Bozeman and her sister was because of the agony of apprehension that must be felt by the husband and their friends. They had ridden with all haste for the crossing of the Colorado, only to learn, when they came up with the fleeing Apaches, that they had no prisoners with them.

"That ought to be a vast relief for their fears," said Kingsford, uttering words which it was hard for himself to believe; "for they know that you could not have been carried away by any of the other horsemen; there was but a single squad of six who rode to the southward, and when Gannet and Atwood and I were through with them, but three were left. Consequently Al will realize that you must have fled into the foothills."

"What will lead him to think that?" asked Mrs. Bozeman.

"The probability was suggested by Atwood and myself, and he knows that we stayed behind to search for you. He will hurry back to learn the truth."

"He cannot tell whether we are captives or have been slain."

"No; his anxiety must continue until the blessed truth becomes known; there is no help for that. But there are three of us and we are well armed; I have a belt of cartridges, and I hardly suppose that the magazines of your Winchesters are empty."

"No," said Miss Warren; "we have used a number, but several cartridges are left."

"You proved your ability to take care of yourselves when alone, and ought to be able to do so now when I am with you. But the Apaches seem to be everywhere," added the young man, with an uneasy glance behind and around them; "and it will be no child's play to give them the slip."

"Shall we remain here or seek some other point?" asked the elder sister.

"It is useless to penetrate any further into the foothills, for we shall have to return, and it is unsafe to go back to where your house was lately standing."

"Why not make our way to Mr. Gannet's?" asked Miss Warren; "we shall find shelter there, unless that, too, has been burned."

"Doubtless the Apaches meant to destroy it, but they have been handled so roughly that they have given up the purpose, for if it were burned, we should have seen the light in the sky."

"Kate's plan strikes me favorably; we can pick our way from among these hills until we reach the plain, and then foot it to Gannet's."

"We may come upon some of the ponies, for quite a number are wandering over the country tonight without riders or owners."

Accordingly the proposal was acted upon. The task was not a slight one, for there was fully half a mile of the roughest kind of traveling between them and the comparatively level country. They had left the paths, and could not expect to find any more to serve them. Although the women had spent several hours in the severest labor for their minds and bodies, they expressed their readiness to keep up the tramp until the home of their friend was reached.

Kingsford took the lead, with Miss Warren walking close behind him and her sister at the rear. The greeting between him and the younger lady had been no more demonstrative than in the case of the elder, but there was a world of eloquence in the face of each when, under the bright glare of the moonlight, their eyes met. That look said more than words, for it was the exchange of affection and love.

At the moment of starting, Kingsford felt a gentle touch from the young woman just behind him. Without looking around or seeming to notice it, he reached back his hand and she took it in her own. Not a word was uttered, but there was a warm pressure on the part of both, and she released her fingers, thrilled as was her lover by the sweet exchange of confidence.

It was done so deftly that the lovers were sure the third member of the little party had not seen it. But, all the same, Mrs. Bozeman had noticed the byplay. She said nothing, for she was not displeased.

CHAPTER XI.—A CRISIS.

LITTLE was spoken by the three as they picked their way through the rough region. With the proof they had received of the presence in the foothills of Geronimo himself and several of his band, they could not forget for an instant the danger that impended over them. Should a meeting take place, it would be impossible for all of the three to escape, and more than likely every one would fall victims to the ferocity of the renegades, who scarcely knew the meaning of mercy.

Frequently Kingsford stopped and listened. At such times, his companions did the same while the bright eyes were not idle. The strong moonlight added to their anxiety, for there were many places which they were obliged to cross where the illumination was almost like midday. If the Apaches were near, they could not fail to see the shadowy figures as they hurried past such openings, and it was always with a shuddering dread that the passage was made.

A shock came to the three, when immediately after one of these experiences, a stamping noise was heard as if made by the hoofs of a horse. The party became instantly motionless, and peered intently in the direction whence the alarming sound came, while Kingsford grasped his Winchester and held it in front of him. Nothing could be seen, but, recalling the artifice by which he had located the treacherous Alkus, he knelt down and pressed his ear to the ground. The result was hardly less startling than in the former instance. It seemed as if a hundred animals were stamping the earth near them.

And such was the fact. While he was still kneeling, Miss Warren saw several cattle moving along the moonlit edge of one of the natural clearings. They were a part of the immense herd belonging to Bozeman that had wandered to this locality, while looking for grass and water, and some of them were making a change of position.

A general smile followed the discovery and the party continued their tramp, much relieved, for they reasoned that if any of the Apaches were near them the cattle would show it by their nervousness. That they did not was proof that little was to be apprehended from the source of all their trouble.

One unpleasant suspicion, however, had grown into certainty. Without any means of guidance, it was too much to expect the fugitives to follow a straight course to the plain. Knowing this difficulty, Kingsford did his best to steer their route by the position of the moon in the heavens, but it was well nigh impossible. At the end of more than an hour, he abruptly halted.

"It is not a very pleasant truth to admit," he said, "but there can be no longer any doubt that we are astray."

"I suspected it from the first," calmly replied Mrs. Bozeman.

"I was certain of it," added Miss Warren.

"Why did you not enlighten me?" he asked. "I was doing my best and would have sworn that my course was right, until this proof that it is not."

"That was the trouble," said Miss Warren; "a person is never so certain of being right as when every one else knows he is wrong."

"Since all the wisdom has centered in that brain of yours," said Kingsford with a smile, "be good enough to show us which is the right way to reach the plain."

"There can be no doubt that it is *that* direction."

And she indicated a course at right angles to the one they were following.

"Why, Kate, what put that idea into your head?" asked her sister reprovingly. "If you will think for a moment, you cannot help seeing that the open country lies off here."

Had Kingsford dared to do so, he would have laughed aloud, for in order to accept the theory of the elder lady, he would have had to walk directly back over his own trail. He was equally positive that both were mistaken.

"The gradual rise of the hills ought to have given us the knowledge needed," said he, "but for the last half hour it seems to me there is no general variance in the surface."

"I am sure we shall never find our way out of this place by following the course over which you have been leading us," was the emphatic remark of Miss Warren.

"Since we are each positive that the others are wrong, the puzzle is to decide who is right. Mrs. Bozeman, where will the sun rise?"

She indicated what she believed to be the eastern horizon.

"And I insist that it will be *here*," said Kingsford.

"And I name *that* point," said Miss Warren, adding triumphantly, "and that you are both wrong is proved by the fact that the sun is already rising exactly where I said it would."

To their amazement they saw she was right. It was already growing light in the east. Kingsford had been following the wrong course, and would have gone still further, astray had he allowed Mrs. Bozeman to guide him.

"I bow to your superior wisdom," said he, taking off his hat and bending low; "henceforth you are my guide."

"I cannot prove more incompetent than the one who has been serving us,"

Since it was evident that a considerable distance remained to be covered, the escort insisted that all should rest themselves. There was considerable water deep among the foothills, and they sat down on the boulders, after drinking therefrom. Each had a good appetite, but there was no means of gratifying it, and it would be no great deprivation to go without food for a number of hours to come.

With the ladies seated on the boulder and Harvey Kingsford a few paces away, he asked himself whether it was prudent to accept it as a fact that nothing further was to be feared from the Apaches. Even though consider-

able time had elapsed since seeing or hearing them, he knew the bloodhound-like persistency of the race, and could not feel secure until he and his friends were literally and figuratively "out of the woods."

He could not urge them to hurry, since they were tired, but he would have been glad had they felt his impatience to get forward. They gave no evidence of drowsiness, but talked cheerfully. He had purposely chosen a secluded place, where it looked improbable that any prowling enemy would discover them, though the appearance of the sun increased the danger of such a misfortune.

The subdued conversation was going on in this lively style when the awful peril burst upon them as unexpectedly as a bolt from heaven when the sky is clear.

Miss Warren saw it first. With white face and a gasp of horror, she pointed beyond Kingsford and uttered the single, terrified word:

"Look!"

Around the corner of the rock walked no less a personage than Geronimo himself. Directly back of him, three bucks rose silently from behind a large rock, with their Winchesters so pointed that Kingsford, Mrs. Bozeman, and her sister were covered. The fingers already resting on the triggers had but to press them a trifle harder to send the whites into eternity before they could raise a hand in defense. Never did the Apaches with all their cunning so completely outwit a member of the race hated above all others.

Having disposed of his men so as to command the three, Geronimo walked forward. His seamed and hard countenance one of the most forbidding that can be imagined, was without a smile, but there was something in the twinkle of the little black eyes and in the twitching lines at the corners of the mouth that told his enjoyment of the scene.

This terrible fellow has a good knowledge of English, so that it was easy for him and his victims to understand one another. His undoubted intention was to kill or capture every one of those in his power, but with all his malignant subtlety, the miscreant forgot one of the simplest of precautions, universally remembered in the Southwest. He seemed to overlook the fact that every one of the three persons before him had a loaded weapon at command. Even though two of them were women, his only safe course was to order them to throw up their hands, but he did nothing of the kind.

He forgot another significant fact. Before Mrs. Bozeman and her sister would submit to being made prisoners, they would shoot each other where they sat. Had they failed to do so, they would have been blamed by their friends. The threat, therefore, of Geronimo to slay them unless they submitted could have no effect, for they would infinitely prefer death to submission.

Harvey Kingsford formed his resolution on the instant he recognized the terrible Apache. Before even the miscreant spoke, the young man like a flash drew his revolver from his hip pocket, and leveled it at the chief, standing less than twelve feet distant.

"Geronimo," said he, in the same moment that he made this startling movement, "you can tell your men to fire, and if they do so, each one of us will fall dead; but you cannot kill me quick enough to prevent my pulling

the trigger of this pistol which is aimed at your heart ; if you give your order, as sure as the sun is shining in God's heavens, you will die with us ! ”

The young man did not remove his fierce gaze from the hideous countenance before him. Geronimo had no paint on his features, and he could scarcely have made them more terrifying had he daubed his face like most of his fellows. His eyes suggested those of a rattlesnake as they met the gaze of the young man, who seemed, in spite of his woful situation, to have obtained the drop on the chieftain himself.

As Kingsford sat, the other bucks were in the field of vision. They were ready to fire, but dared not do so without the order of their leader.

“ What think you to do ? ” asked Geronimo in his gruff, grating voice, and without a change of expression ; “ you can do nothing.”

Kingsford could not see either of his companions, and he spoke without looking toward them :

“ Don't move or try to do anything, for you are helpless ; leave everything to me.”

A horrible fear was in the minds of the women. Suppose the Apaches should shoot Kingsford and spare *them* ? But they held the remedy.

“ If they slay you and spare us,” said Kate Warren in a low voice, in which there was not a tremor, “ I shall shoot Molly at the same time that she shoots me. That's our bargain ; think no more of us.”

But if they attempted that, as they would prefer to do, Harvey Kingsford was still sure he could kill Geronimo before yielding up his own life. A similar belief must have flashed upon the chief, for he stood irresolute.

“ I've told you what I shall do,” replied Kingsford, with revolver leveled and his piercing eye fixed upon the fellow ; “ you may spare the women, but they will kill each other before you can lay hands on them ; you can order your three bucks to turn their guns on me and I won't live more than five seconds, but in those five seconds I shall press this trigger and the bullet will bore its way through that infernal heart of yours which has throbbed too long already. If you don't believe me, *try it and see !* ”

“ Geronimo will not hurt ; he will take you as captives ; he will treat you like you be his brothers and sisters.”

“ You're a liar ! Not one of us believes a word you say ! ”

Kingsford rose to his feet, as if he wished to put himself in plainer view of the three Apaches, who must have been puzzled at the situation. Standing thus, with one foot thrown slightly forward and arm outstretched, with pistol pointed, while the other hand instinctively grasped his Winchester, he formed a striking feature. The sullen chieftain, holding also a Winchester in one hand, but with the weapon at his side, completed one of the most impressive tableaux that can be conceived.

The preponderating advantage of the white people lay in the fact that all of them expected to die, and preferred to do so rather than surrender, while the Apaches had no wish to shuffle off the mortal coil until at some remote and indefinite date in the future.

Not often was Geronimo addressed in this manner, and never before had he been placed in so peculiar a situation.

His hesitation told Kingsford that he had scored his point. The Apache would not give an order to fire when he knew it meant his own death. But what was to be the end of this unparalleled situation? It could not last; there must be a change right speedily.

Kingsford saw a quick glance exchanged between Geronimo and one of his bucks. Suspecting its meaning, he said:

"I only want an excuse to kill you. If one of your men stirs, I shall shoot you! If you attempt to move, you are a dead dog. You have no right to live, and the best thing I can do is to rid the country of such a devil."

It is impossible to conjecture how the scene would have terminated but for an occurrence that was as wholly unexpected as the appearance of Geronimo himself. Suddenly one of the three Apaches uttered an exclamation as of alarm. Geronimo looked toward him. Then the wrinkled, iron countenance clearly showed that he was frightened at something he had discovered.

Kingsford dared not follow the direction of his eyes, for Geronimo would be instant to seize the advantage thus offered; so the revolver remained pointed, and every movement of the chieftain was watched with unflinching steadiness.

All at once three forms ran athwart Kingsford's field of vision, as if fleeing from some terrifying danger. Then Geronimo himself, with a suppressed exclamation, wheeled and followed them at breakneck speed, all four running as if Satan was nipping at their heels.

The young man had warned the chieftain that he would fire at the first movement he made, but there had been no thought of the Apache doing anything like this. So long as he continued fleeing, there could be no objection.

Thus it was that the wondering Kingsford held his revolver leveled until Geronimo and his three bucks had passed from sight.

CHAPTER XII.—THE PART PLAYED BY PHOTOGRAPHY.

FIFTY yards away, on a rock a dozen feet in height, stood R. Field Atwood with his camera resting on its tripod and pointed at the spot where the incidents just narrated had occurred.

At that moment the amazed man and women looked in his direction, he flung his hat in air and shouted:

"Magnificent! splendid! the finest view I have secured yet! It will be the gem of my collection!"

Since the view had already been obtained, he folded his apparatus together, and carefully clambering down the rough sides of the rock, came forward to greet his friends, who, it need not be said, were delighted to meet him.

"I had no patience, Atwood, with that arrangement of yours," said Kingsford, "but it seems to have done us a good turn."

"There's no doubt of it, and it isn't the first time either that it has gone into that business; it saved my life yesterday, as I explained to you."

"But do you tell me that when you saw the terrible situation of the

ladies and myself, that, instead of coming to our help, you reared that camera and deliberately set out to take our picture?"

"I should hardly put it that way; I was groping through this rough country, looking for the ladies and incidentally for another good view, when I caught sight of the extraordinary scene. I couldn't understand it at first, but it was so still that I heard every word you said and that made it clear. I had taken position with my Winchester aimed at Geronimo intending to open the ball by wiping him out, when I saw that you had him foul. Neither he nor any of his men dare stir.

"Then the beauty of the scene struck me. Think of it: Geronimo standing there with his rifle by his side; his three bucks a little way off, each with his gun; the ladies seated on the boulder, silent and appalled, and best of all, your pose! When you rose to your feet, took a half step forward with your revolver pointed at Geronimo, denounced him and swore that you would shoot him dead upon his slightest move, the scene was worthy of the finest artist. I nearly broke my neck in getting my apparatus in position.

"The Apaches were so interested in you, that they did not look toward me. It did not take me long to get matters in shape; you and Geronimo were obliging enough to stand still until the exposure was finished; then I clapped the cap over the tube and they must have heard the noise, for they looked my way. The next minute they were tumbling over one another to get beyond reach of the new fangled gun that was about to blow them to kingdom come. And what a splendid picture it was my good fortune to secure! I congratulate myself on my luck."

"Mr. Atwood, will you do me a favor?" asked Miss Warren, laying her hand on his arm and looking wistfully up into his face.

"Anything in my power is yours to command."

"Give me one of the pictures."

"And me, too," added Mrs. Bozeman.

"They shall be yours; what fine views they will make to hang on the walls of your homes!"

Kingsford proposed, now that they knew the right course to follow, that they should hasten out of the foothills, and his suggestion was adopted. With all the care and speed they could use, it was more than an hour before they reached the edge of the sandy plain. The diagonal course brought them out some two miles from the burned home, so that a long distance remained to be passed on foot to reach the shelter of Gannet's ranch.

Atwood was a good natured man, but his friends never saw him so angry as when he made his way to the spot where he had left his pony Jack, and where he was confident of finding him again. He did find him, but he was dead. Some Apache passing by and not caring for the animal had shot him. Kingsford made a search for his own horse, but found no trace of him. He suspected he had been taken by the Apaches, and since he never saw him again, that was probably the cause of his disappearance.

The heat, if anything, was more frightful than on the preceding day. Kingsford and the women contemplated the ten mile tramp with dread.

"I think it best that we should wait till the sun goes down, for there is

danger in exposing ourselves to its rays. The difficulty, however, is that we are in need of food, and have no way of obtaining it."

"The weather is so cool and invigorating," said Atwood, "that I will cheerfully walk to Gannet's and bring horses and sunshades for you."

"Bring a pony to carry back your camera."

"Not much I don't!" replied the crank of a philosopher; "I don't take any such risk as that. The precious thing goes with *me*."

And resting it on his shoulder, he strode off through the awful heat, as if it were a crisp, invigorating day in autumn.

His friends watched him until he disappeared, seemingly suffering not the slightest discomfort from the smiting rays. Despite his well known salamander qualities, the ladies expressed fear for him, but Kingsford assured them there was no ground for misgiving, since he had never given evidence of being affected by the climate, which often proves fatal to persons unaccustomed to it.

The three were able to find something approaching shade, but their situation was anything but pleasant. Looking over the pulsating plain to the westward, they saw no sign of life, until Miss Warren directed attention to what seemed to be a number of flickering specks in the distance. A few minutes later, these specks resolved themselves into horsemen coming toward them. Suspecting their identity, Kingsford walked out on the plain and waved his hat. Soon he was noticed, and Al Bozeman and his companions, recognizing the party, dashed forward with increased speed, despite the ferocity of the heat. It was a happy reunion indeed. More than one eye unaccustomed to tears was moistened with gratitude at the extraordinary escape of the imperiled women.

Gannet's ranch was now the haven of all. Mrs. Bozeman was lifted upon the horse of her husband behind him, while Gannet did the same with Miss Warren, and Kingsford rode double with Tonto Jack. Thus mounted the party resumed the journey southward, and before noon arrived at their destination.

Bozeman had carried out his first intention, and by riding hard reached the crossing of the Colorado so far in advance of the raiding Apaches that there had been time to prepare for their decisive and rattling reception. The fact that the band had no captives did not lighten the blows that were struck them. The miscreants had been on many raids, but in none were the consequences so disastrous to themselves. They lost fully one half of their best, or rather worst men, and others carried away wounds whose scars will remain with them through life. Geronimo himself never came so near being snuffed out as when R. Field Atwood drew bead upon him from the adjoining rock.

On the following day, a squad of United States cavalry drew rein at the Gannet house. They had been out with their company in pursuit of Geronimo and his band, and called to make some inquiries and to report what had been done. The renegades moved with their usual swiftness, but a suspicion of what was in the wind caused Captain Hunt to take their trail sooner than was generally the case.

The severe loss suffered by the band in attacking Bozeman's dampened

their ardor, but they would have continued their raid, had not the cavalry got upon the ground in time to round them up. The band was already back on the reservation or would be in a short time. There they would remain good Indians, until another suitable opportunity presented itself for a career of devastation and murder.

Bozeman was not discouraged by the loss of his dwelling house. With characteristic American pluck he set to work, and with the help of his friends, soon had another structure reared on the ruins of the old one. He was grateful because he had suffered no loss of cattle from the Apaches, who often run off large numbers. Events, however, proceeded with such a rush, after they had fairly begun, that the hostiles had no opportunity to kill or steal property.

"Kate," said Harvey Kingsford, some days after the events narrated, "I once had serious thoughts of going into the cattle business."

It was evening and they were strolling over the shaded path, at the rear of Gannet's house, that led a little way into the foothills.

"What are your views now?"

"I am not so enthusiastic; it was a wise remark of Bozeman's that no person should take up any kind of business or profession without preliminary training."

"You have had considerable training during the brief time you have spent in Arizona."

"But it has not been of a nature to make me admire the life of a cowboy. We could hardly expect a repetition of our good fortune if Geronimo decided to pay us another visit, as he is likely to do."

"My feelings are much the same; I have tried to persuade Molly and Al to move eastward, but they seem to be satisfied to live here."

"I am anxious to leave for home; when will you be ready?"

"I haven't fixed the day of my departure; why are you so interested?" she archly asked.

"Because I shall not leave until you do."

"It is very kind of you to act as my escort."

"Kinder to myself than to you, but, my dear girl, I wish you to know that when we reach the land of civilization, I have no intention of dropping out of your life in the way you seem to take for granted."

They were nearing delicate ground, whither it is not necessary for us to follow them. Let it suffice that some sort of understanding must have been reached, for the declaration of Harvey Kingsford was fulfilled in spirit and letter. He was the escort of Miss Kate Warren when she returned to her home, and is now happy in the privilege of acting as her escort through life. They had been through danger, trial, and suffering together, and that many years of comfort and happiness may now be theirs, we are sure is the wish of the reader who has followed their fortunes through the events we set out to relate.

Latham C. Carleton.

THE END.

BY RIGHT OF SWORD.*

A tale of Moscow, the Nihilists, and the Czar—The extraordinary experiences of an Englishman who assumes the name and obligations of a Russian army officer—Complications that bring the bold adventurer within shivering distance of Siberia, and the tactics which earn for him a notable nickname.

CHAPTER I.—THE MEETING.

MOSCOW.

MY DEAR RUPERT :

Don't worry your head about me. I shall be all right. I did not see you before leaving, because of the scene with your sister and Cargill, which they may perhaps tell you about. I have done with England ; and as the auspices are all for war, I mean to have a shy in. I went to Vienna, thinking to offer myself to the Turks ; but my sixteen years in Russia have made too much of a Russ of me to let me tolerate those lazy, cruel beggars. So I turned this way. I'm going on to St. Petersburg today, for I find all the people I knew here as a lad have gone north. I have made such a mess of things that I shall never set foot in England again. If Russia will have me, I shall volunteer, and I hope with all my soul that a Turkish bullet will find its billet in my body. It shan't be my fault if it doesn't. If I hadn't been afraid of being thought afraid, I'd have taken a shorter way half a score of times. My life is an inexpressible burden, and I only wish to God some one would think it worth while to take it. I don't want to be hard on your sister, but whatever was left in my heart or life, she has emptied, and I only wish she'd ended it at the same time. You'll know I'm pretty bad when not even the thought of our old friendship gives me a moment's pleasure. Good by. Don't come out after me. You won't find me if you do. Your friend,

HAMILTON TRECETHNER.

THE letter was wretchedly inconsequential. When I sat down to write I hadn't meant to tell Rupert Balestier that his sister's treatment had made such a mess of things for me ; but my pen ran away with me as it always does, and I wasn't inclined to write the letter all over again. I hate letter writing. I was to leave Moscow, moreover, in an hour or two, and when I had had my things sent to the railway station and followed them, I dropped the letter into the box without altering a word.

It had made me thoughtful, however ; and I stood on the platform looking moodily about me, wondering whether I should find the end I wished most speedily by joining the army or the Nihilists ; and which course would bring me the most exciting and quickest death.

I had three or four hours to wait before my train left, and I walked up and down the platform trying to force myself to feel an interest in what was going on about me. Presently I noticed that I was the object of the close vigilance of a small group of soldiers, such as will generally be seen hanging about the big stations in Russia. They looked at me very intently ; I noticed

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them whisper one to another evidently about me, and as I passed they drew themselves up to the attention and saluted me. I returned the salute, amused at their mistake, and entered one of the large waiting saloons.

It was empty save for one occupant who was standing by the big stove looking out of a window. This was a girl, and a glimpse I caught of her face showed me she was pretty, while her attitude seemed to suggest grief.

As I entered and went to another part of the room, she started and glanced at me and then looked away. A few seconds later, however, she looked round furtively, and then to my abundant surprise, come across and said in a low, confidential tone :

"It is not enough, Alexis. I knew you in a minute. But you acted the stranger to perfection."

She was not only pretty, but very pretty, I thought, as she stood with her face raised toward mine, a light of some kind of emotion shining in her eyes, where I saw traces of tears. But my recent experiences of Edith Balestier had toughened me a lot, and I was suspicious of this young woman.

"Pardon me, madame, you have made a mistake."

Then she smiled, rather sadly, and her teeth shone salt white between her full, curved lips.

"Your voice would betray you, even if your eyes did not. Do you think the mere shaving of your beard and mustache can hide such eyes. Just look into mine and see if the shade is not exact."

I did look into them, and very beautiful eyes hers were. Little shining blue heavens, all radiant with the light of infinite capacity to feel. Fascinating eyes, very. But I had not lived the first sixteen years of my life in Russia without getting to know that in that big land all is not snow that looks white ; and that a very awkward intrigue may lurk beneath a very fair seeming surface.

"Madame, I am charmed, but I have not the honor of knowing you."

A passing cloud of irritation showed and a little gesture of impatience, sufficient to remind me that the gloved hands were very small.

"Ah, why keep this up now? There is no need, and no time. Is not the train starting in less than an hour—and, by the way, what madness is it that makes you loiter around here in this public way, out of uniform and as if there were no danger and you were merely taking a week's holiday, instead of flying for——"

"Madame," I broke in again, "I must repeat, I am a stranger. You must not tell me these things. My name is Hamylton Tregethner, an Englishman, and——"

"Yes, yes, I know you are ; or at least I know you are going to call yourself English, though you haven't told me what your name is to be. But I know that you are my brother Alexis, going to leave me perhaps forever, and that when I want to scold you for running this risk—for you know there are police, and soldiers, and spies in plenty to identify you—you——" Here she made as if to throw herself into my arms. But suspecting some trick, I stepped back.

"Madame, I must ask you to be good enough not to play this comedy any further." I spoke rather sternly.

"If your disguise were only as good as your acting, Alexis, not a soul in Russia would suspect you. Oh, I see what you mean," she cried, a look of intelligence breaking over her features. "I forgot. Of course, I am compromising your disguise by thus speaking to you. I am sorry. It was my love for you made me thoughtless, when I should have been thoughtful. I will go away." She turned on me such a look of genuine grief that it melted my skepticism.

"There is really some strange error," I said, speaking much more gently. "At first I thought you were intentionally mistaking me for some one else; for what object I knew not. But I see now the error was involuntary. I give you my honor, madame, that you are under a complete mistake if you take me for any relative of your own. I am an Englishman, as I say, and I arrived in Moscow only last night and am leaving for St. Petersburg by the next express train. I am afraid, if you persist in your mistake, it may have unpleasant consequences for you. Hence my plain speech. But I am what I say."

As I finished, I raised my hat that she might convince herself of her blunder.

She looked at me with the most careful scrutiny, even walking round to get a view of my figure. Then she came back and gazed into my face again; and I could see that she was still unconvinced.

"It is impossible," she said, under her breath. "If I allow for the difference your beard and mustache would make, you are my brother."

"I am Hamylton Tregethner," I replied, and I took out my pocketbook and showed her my passport "to Paris, Vienna, Moscow, and traveling on the Continent."

"These things can be bought—or made," she said. Then she seemed to understand how she had committed herself with me, if I were really a stranger, and I saw her look at me with fear, doubt, and speculation on her pretty, expressive face.

She sighed and lifted her hands as if in half despair.

"Madame, you have my word as an Englishman that not a syllable of what you have said shall pass my lips." The bright glance of gratitude she threw me inspired me to add: "If I can be of any help in this matter, you may command me absolutely."

She gave me a little stiff look, and I thought I had offended her; but the next moment a light of eagerness took its place.

"When are you leaving?" she asked, with an indifference I could see was assumed.

"By the St. Petersburg express at six o'clock."

"That is two hours after the Smolensk train." She paused to think, and glanced at me once, as if weighing whether she dare ask me something. Then she said quickly: "Will you give me a couple of hours of your company on this platform and in the station this afternoon?"

It was a strange sort of request, and when I saw how anxiously she

awaited my reply I could perceive she had a strong motive, and one that had certainly nothing to do with any desire for my society.

Then suddenly I guessed her motive. The cunning little woman! Her brother was obviously going to fly from Moscow. She saw that, inasmuch as she herself had mistaken me for him, others would certainly do so; and thus, if she and I were together, the brother could get away unsuspected and would be flying from Moscow while he would be thought to be still walking about the station with his sister. I liked the idea, and the girl's pluck on behalf of her brother.

"I will give you not only two hours," I said, "but two days, or two weeks, if you like—if you will tell me candidly what your reason is."

She started at this, and saw by my expression that I had guessed her very open secret.

"If you will walk with me outside, I will do that," she said. "I am a very poor diplomatist." With that we went out on the platform and began a conversation that had momentous results for us both.

She told me quite frankly that she wished me to act as a cover for her brother's flight.

"No harm can come to you. You will only have to prove your identity, otherwise I should not have asked this," she said apologetically. And then to excuse herself, she added: "And I should have told you, even if you had not asked me."

I believed in her sincerity now, and I let her know that I did in a round-about way. Then I said: "I am in earnest that I will stay on in Moscow for a day or two if you wish. I have nothing whatever to do. I can't tell you all my reasons, as that would mean telling you a biggish slice of my life, but feel assured that, if there's likely to be any adventure in it from which some men might shrink, it would rather attract me than otherwise. But if you care to tell me the reasons of your brother's flight, I will breathe no word of them to a soul, and I may be of help." I began to scent an adventure, and the perfume pleased me.

My words set her thinking deeply, and we took two or three turns up and down before she answered.

"No, you mustn't stop over today," she said slowly. Then she added thoughtfully: "I don't know what Alexis would say to my speaking plainly, but I should dearly like to." She turned her face to me and looked long and searchingly into my eyes. Then she smiled slightly—a smile of confidence. "I feel I can trust you. I will risk it and tell you. My brother is flying because a man in his regiment"—here her eyes shone and her cheeks colored to a deep red—"has fastened a quarrel on him. This man has worried me and I don't like him"—the blush was of indignation now—"and because of this, he has picked a quarrel with Alexis, and tomorrow means to kill him in that barbarous assassination you men call dueling. He knows he is infinitely more skilful than poor Alexis, and that my dear brother is no match for him with either sword or pistol."

The tears overflowed here, and made the eyes look more bright and beautiful than ever.

"Why didn't your brother refuse to fight?"

"How could he?" she asked despairingly. "He would have been a marked man—a coward. And this wretch would have triumphed over him. And he knows this, because he offered to let Alexis off, if I—if I—oh, that I were a man!" she cried, changing the note of indignant grief for anger.

"Do you mean he has made such an offer as this since the challenge passed?"

"Yes, my brother came and told me. But I could not do it. And now this has come."

I didn't think very highly of the brother, but he had evidently talked his sister round. What I thought of most was the chance of a real adventure which the thing promised.

The man must be a bully and a scoundrel, and it would serve him right to give him a lesson. If this girl had not recognized me, perhaps he would not. I felt that I should like to try. There was no reason forbidding it. I could easily spare a couple of days for the little drama, and go on to St. Petersburg afterwards.

"You are very anxious for your brother's safety?" I asked.

"He is my only protector in the world. If he gets away now to Berlin or Paris, I shall follow and go to him."

"But he is not likely to get away when he will be missed in a few hours. A single telegram from Moscow will close every frontier barrier in Russia."

"We know that;" and she wrung her hands.

"If he could have two clear days he could reach the frontier and pass unquestioned," I said significantly.

She was quick witted and saw my point with all a woman's sharpness.

"Your life is not ours to give away. This man is noted for his skill."

"Would every one be likely to make the same mistake about me that you have made this afternoon?" I asked in reply.

She looked at me again. She was trembling a little in her earnestness.

"Now that I know, I can see differences—especially in your expression; but in all Moscow there is not a man or woman who would not take you for my brother."

"Then I decide for the two days here. And if it will make you more comfortable, I can assure you I am quite as able to take care of myself with either sword or pistol as this bully you speak of. But it is for you to decide."

There came a pause, at the end of which she said, her face wearing a more frightened look:

"No, it must not be. There are other reasons. My brother is mixed up with—"

"Excuse me, can you tell me which is the train for Smolensk?" asked a man who came up and interrupted us, speaking in a mixture of Russian, English, and German.

The girl started violently, and I guessed the man was her brother. A glance at his eyes confirmed this. They were a weak rendering of the glorious blue ones that had been inspiring me to all sorts of impulses for the last hour.

"That disguise is too palpable," I said quietly. He had shaved and was wearing false hair that could deceive no one. But in a few minutes the whole situation was explained to him by his quick witted sister.

"I've only consented to go in order that Olga here may not be robbed of her only protector," he said, thinking apparently to explain away his cowardice. "She has no one in the world to look after her but me, you know. If you'll help her in this matter, she will be very much obliged; and so shall I. You needn't go out tomorrow and fight Devinsky—that's the major's name: Loris Devinsky. My regiment's the Moscow Infantry Regiment, you know. If you'll go to my rooms and sham ill, no one will know you, and as soon as I'm over the frontier I'll wire Olga, and you can get away."

"Very well," said I. "But you'll get over no frontier if you wear a beard which every one with eyes can see is false, and talk in a language that no one ever spoke on this earth. Pull off the beard: the little black mustache may stay. Speak English, or your own tongue, and play my part to the frontier; and here, take my passport; but post it back to your sister to be given to me as soon as you are safe over. And for heavens' sake don't walk as if you were a thief looking out for arrest. No one suspects; so carry yourself as if no one had cause to."

It was a good thing for him I had seen his sister first. He would never have got me to personate him even for a couple of hours.

But we got him off all right, and his sister was so pleased that I could not help feeling pleased also. First, in his assumed character he made such arrangements for my luggage as I wished, and then we hurried up to the train just before it started. As we reached the barrier where the papers had to be examined, he turned and bade his sister good by, and then said to me aloud in Russian, hiding his voice a little:

"Well, good by, Alexis," and he shook hands with me.

"Good by," I answered with a laugh; and he waved an adieu to us from the other side of the barrier.

As we turned away together, Olga was a little pale. Three soldiers saluted me, and I acknowledged the salute gravely, glancing at them as I passed.

Then I noticed a couple of men who had been standing together and watching the girl and myself for some time, leave their places and follow us. I told my companion, and presently I saw her turn and look at them, and then start and shiver.

"Do you know them?" I asked.

"Alas, yes. They are Nihilist spies, watching us."

"Ah, then there is more in this than I have understood so far," I said.

"You shall know everything," she replied, as we left the station.

CHAPTER II.—I AM A NIHILIST.

"I THINK if you don't mind we will go back to the station," said my companion, stopping after we had walked a little way without speaking. "It is a very convenient place to talk in. Besides, you have to decide whether this thing shall be carried any farther."

"I have already decided," I replied quietly. "I am going through with it, if it is at all possible. But I have thought of many difficulties."

"You must know all that I can tell you, please, before you decide, or I shall be very uncomfortable." She said this very firmly and earnestly.

"Certainly you must tell me everything that will help me to know what manner of man I am now." I smiled as I said this to reassure her; but she was very earnest and a little pale.

She waited a while until there was no one near us, and then said in a low tone:

"My brother is mixed up with the Nihilists in some way. I don't know how, quite, but I believe they suspect him of having played them false, and I think his life was threatened. Those two men you saw at the station were spies, sent either to stop him or if he got away to follow him."

"But they didn't attempt to stop him."

"No, they mistook you for him, thinking they could see through the disguise of a clean shaven face. Had you entered the train, they would very likely have told you openly not to go, or have warned you of the consequences."

"And what would be the consequences?"

"Surely you know what it means for a Nihilist to disobey orders? It is death." She was white now and agitated. "I am so ashamed at not having told you before you took the first step."

"It would have made no difference in my decision," I replied promptly. "But tell me, are you also mixed up with them in any way?"

"I am putting my liberty and perhaps my life into your hands," she said. "My brother has drawn me in with him to a certain extent. You know they like to have women in the ranks."

"I am sorry for you. I have rarely known a Nihilist who was capable of getting much pleasure out of life." A cold touch of fear seemed to contract her features, as she shrank a little from me.

"You! What—how come you to know anything of this? You said you were—an Englishman!"

"I am an Englishman, but I lived the first sixteen years of my life in Russia; the last six of them in Moscow here; and I know much of Russian life. I have made only one visit to Russia since I left; and this time I arrived only last night, and intended to go on to St. Petersburg as I told you today. It will save time in this matter if you can make up your mind to believe absolutely in my good faith."

I looked into her face as I said this, and I held out my hand. She laid hers in it, and we clasped hands in a strong, firm grip as a token of mutual faith and friendship. I believed in and meant to stand by her.

"I will trust you now," she said simply, after a pause.

"As for what you have told me, it can make no difference to me," I declared. "If I go out and meet this fellow Devinsky tomorrow, and he beats me, it will be all the same to me whether I am a Nihilist or an Englishman. There is only one soul in all the world who will care; and I shall give you a letter to be posted to him—if things go wrong."

I stopped to give her an opportunity of promising to do this ; but she remained silent. I felt rather a clumsy fool. She was such a sensitive little body, that the thought of my being killed as the result of her having got me to help her brother away, naturally upset her. She couldn't know how gladly I should welcome the other man's sword point between my ribs.

After a pause of considerable constraint she said :

"There is no need whatever for you to go out and meet Major Devinsky. You can do as Alexis said ; be ill in bed until the passport comes back, and then leave."

"Oh, I'm not one to play the coward in that way," said I lightly, when a look of reproach from her eyes made me curse myself as a clumsy fool for this reflection on her brother's want of pluck. "I mean this : if I take up a part in anything I must play it my own way ; but there's more than that behind. I don't want to look like bragging before you ; but I have come out here to Russia to volunteer for the war which every one says must come with Turkey. I've done it because—well, you may guess that a man has a pretty strong reason when he wants to volunteer to fight another country's battles. It's the sort of thing in which he can expect plenty of the kicks, but others get all the ha'pence. I've not been a success in England, and I've had a stroke lately that's made me sick of things. I can't explain all this in detail ; but the long and short of it is that if anything were to happen to me tomorrow morning, it would be a welcome deliverance. Now, you'll understand what I mean when I tell you that nothing you can say as to the danger of the business can do anything but attract me."

My companion listened carefully, and her telltale face was all sympathy.

"Have you no mother nor sister ?" she asked.

"No—fortunately for them."

"Have you never had any one to lean on you and trust to you for guidance and protection ? That helps a good man."

"No, but I've had those who've taken good care to break my trust in them—and everything else." This with a bitter little reminiscent sneer and a shrug of the shoulders. "Still, it has its advantages. Any new part I might wish to play could not be more barren than the old."

My companion shot a glance up into my face as I said this, but made no answer. It was I who broke the silence.

"Time is flying," I said, in a lighter tone ; "and I have much to learn if I am to be your brother for the next two or three days. I want to know where I live, where you live, all that you can tell me about my brother officers and my duties—everything, indeed, that is necessary to prevent my being at once discovered."

After some further expostulation she told me that she and her brother were orphans ; that they had come to Moscow about a year or so before on her brother being transferred to this regiment ; and that the brother had private quarters in the Square of St. Mark, while she lived with an aunt, their only relative, in a suite of rooms close to the cathedral. They were of a very old family, neither rich nor poor, but having enough to live comfortably and mix in some amount of society.

I gathered, however, that Alexis had been the source of much trouble. He had embarrassed his money affairs; lived a fast life; become involved with the Nihilists; dragged in his sister; and had ended by compromising himself in many quarters. She told me the story, so much as she knew of it, very deftly, intending no doubt to screen her brother; but I could read enough between the lines to understand that his life had been anything but saintly. Moreover, I was very much mistaken if he were not as arant a coward as ever crowed in a barnyard and ran away when the time came for fighting.

I take no credit to myself for not being a coward: and I am quite ready to believe that there are sound physiological reasons for it. Nature may have forgotten to give me those nerves which make men afraid; but it is the case that never in my life have I experienced even a passing sensation of fear. I would just as soon die as go to sleep. I have seen men, much better men than I and quite as truly brave, shudder at the idea of death and shrink with dread from the thought of pain. But at no time in my life have I cared for either; and I have come to regard this as due to nature's considerate omissions in my creation. Certain other omissions of hers have not been so considerate.

This will explain, however, why the thought of the danger which troubled my new "sister" so much did not cause me even a passing uneasiness, especially at such a time. What I was anxious to do was to get hold of as much detail as possible of my new character. I was sufficiently interested by it to wish to play it successfully.

To this end I questioned my companion very closely indeed about the names and appearance of the brother's friends and fellow officers, about the habits of military life, and in short about everything I deemed likely to help me not to stumble.

At the close of the examination I said:

"At any rate, we two must begin to rehearse. You must call me Alexis, and must allow me to call you Olga; and we must do it always to avoid slips."

She saw the need but blushed a bit when I added, "And now, Olga, we'll make our first practical experiment. We'll go together to my rooms, and you must show me what sailors call my bearings."

"Shall we walk—Alexis?" she asked, her eyes bright and her cheeks ruddy with pretty confusion.

"By all means—Olga," I answered, returning her smile, and imitating her emphasis on the Christian name. "Do you know that my sister's name has a very quaint sound in my ears, and comes very trippingly to a brother's tongue?"

"But you don't like it, and think it common," she returned.

"I?"

"Yes, you have often said so, Alexis. Surely you remember. Why only this morning you said how silly you had always thought it," she replied demurely.

"Oh, I see!" I laughed. "I've changed that opinion. A good many

other things have changed, too, since this morning," I added drily; and we both laughed then, and considering the circumstances were in extremely good spirits.

"Alexis," she cried, with a sudden warning, as we turned a corner into the Square of St. Gregory, "don't you see who is coming toward us? Major Devinsky and Lieutenants Trackso and Weisswich. The major will pass next you. What will you do?" She asked this in a quick, hurried voice.

"Cut him as dead as a door nail," said I instantly, drawing myself up. "And the other fellows, too; are they friends of mine, by the way?"

"No, they are his toadies," she answered.

Olga bent her face down and would not see them; but I squared my shoulders and held my head aloft, fixing my eyes steadily on the three men as they approached. At first they did not recognize me. Then I saw one of them start, and making a rapid motion of his hand across his chin, he whispered to his companion, both of whom started in their turn and laughed.

As we passed the major made an effusive bow to my "sister," which the other two copied, while all three sneered with an air of insolent braggadocio, and simultaneously put their hands to their chins as their eyes fell on me.

My blood seethed with anger at the insult. Nothing could have fired my eagerness more effectually to begin the drama of my new life. If I didn't punish each of those three for that insult, it should be because death stepped in to stop me.

"I am glad we met them," said I, smiling. "I shall know now which is my adversary tomorrow and shan't pink the wrong man by mistake. But you look a bit scared, Olga." I saw she was very pale.

"I am afraid of that man," she answered. "He is of good family and great wealth, and has a lot of influence in certain circles. He is an ugly enemy."

"Ugly, he certainly is," said I lightly, speaking of his face.

"I mean dangerous," replied the girl seriously.

"I know you do, child," I answered, as naturally as if she were really my sister. "But we'll wait till we talk this over after tomorrow morning. I tell you what I'll promise you as a treat. You shall breakfast with me, or rather I'll breakfast with you, tomorrow, and tell you at first hand all about the meeting. You have been a little too anxious about me."

"I am afraid that might occasion remark," she replied with the demure look I had noticed once or twice before. "You know that you have not always been an attentive brother, Alexis, and it is not good acting to overdo the part;" and she threw me a little smile and a glance.

I laughed and answered, "That may be, but I've changed since the morning, as I told you before."

"Very well, then. You remember, of course, that aunt never gets up early enough to have breakfast with me—but you shall come if"—and here the light died right out of her face, and her underlip trembled so that she had to bite it to keep it steady—"if all goes well, as I pray it may."

"You are a good sister, and need have no fear. I am not made of the stuff to go down before that bully's sword. So get ready my favorite dish—whatever that may be—and I'll promise to do justice to it."

"Here are your rooms," she said, a moment later, as she stopped before a large, wide house. "They are on the ground floor with those windows. But before we go in, remember your man servant's name is Vosk, and he is a very sharp fellow. And please let me give you a word of warning. Alexis has not only not been attentive to me, but his manner has often been very brusque and—oh, if you had had sisters you would know how brothers behave. They don't mind turning their backs on one; they contradict, and interrupt, and laugh at one; treat one as a convenience, and are rude."

We went in, and I then tried to put a little more bluntness into my manner and to play the brother. The man Vosk started when he saw the change in my appearance. I caught his quick, vigilant eye glance sharply at the pattern and cut of my clothes.

"Does your face hurt you now, Alexis?" asked Olga.

I understood her and answered in a somewhat surly tone, putting my hand to my left cheek. "No, not so much now; but it was an infernally silly joke to play. It's cost me my beard and a suit of clothes. A good thing it wasn't a uniform. Put out something for me to wear, Vosk," I said sharply to the man.

He looked at me again very keenly, but went at once to do what I ordered. Olga and I went into the chief sitting room—there were two leading one out of the other—and sat down. The man's manner had reminded me of several things. Very soon I made an excuse and sent him out.

"You must tell me all about the clothes I have to wear at different functions," I said. "Vosk saw that these were not out of my wardrobe proper; and while he's gone, I'll hurry and change them, and we'll see how the uniforms fit me. A mistake may spoil everything at the last moment."

I ran into the bedroom and slipped into the undress uniform the man had laid ready. To my supreme satisfaction I found that they fitted me fairly well; and though they required some touches here and there they would pass muster as my own. I tried on also some of the other uniforms I saw in the room; and wearing one of them, I went back to "my sister."

She cried out in her astonishment, "My brother Alexis to the life!"

"Your brother Alexis to the death," I answered so earnestly that she colored as I took her hand and kissed it. Then in a lighter tone I added, "Uniforms make all men of anything like the same figure look alike. It's fortunate that your brother's an army man." Then we chatted for some minutes until I thought it prudent to change back again into the undress rig.

Then I took a lesson in uniforms and questioned Olga until she had told me all that she herself knew about them.

CHAPTER III.—MY SECONDS.

I WALKED with my sister to her home, then returned to my rooms and sat down to think out seriously and in detail my extraordinary position.

The more I considered it the more I liked it, and I am bound to add the more dangerous is seemed. Obviously it was one thing to be mistaken for a man and to pass for him for a few minutes or hours ; but it was quite another to take up his life where he had dropped it and play the part day by day and week after week. There must be a thousand threads of the existence of which no one but himself could know, yet each would have to be laid correctly in continuation of the due pattern of his life, or discovery would follow.

Here was my difficulty, and for a time I did not see a way round it, or through it, or under it. So far as I could judge by all that my sister had told me, the resemblance between the real Alexis and myself was strictly limited to physical qualities. A freak of nature had made us outward counterparts of each other in size, look, complexion, voice, and certain gestures. But it stopped there. My other self was a subtle, cunning, intriguing, traitorous conspirator, and very much of a coward ; while I—well, I was not that.

I believe that I have a certain amount of mother wit or shrewdness ; but no process that was ever known or tried on me was sufficient to drive into me even sufficient learning to enable me to scrape through a career. I was the despair first of the Russian schoolmasters for over ten years, and next of all the English tutors who took me in hand during the next ten. I tried to cram for Oxford, but never could get through Smalls ; and the good old master, who loved a strong man, almost cried because after two years he had to send me down, when I was the best oar in the eight, the smartest field and hardest hitter in the eleven, the fastest mile and half mile in the 'varsity, and one of the three strongest men in all Oxford.

But I had to go, and I went to an army crammer to try and be stuffed for the service. I never had a chance with the books ; but I carried all before me in every possible form of sport. It was there I picked up my fencing and revolver shooting. It became a sort of passion with me. I could use the revolver like a trickster and shoot to a hair's breadth ; while with either broadsword or rapier I could beat the fencing master all over the school. However, I was beaten by the examiners and my couple of years' work succeeded only in giving my muscles the hardness of steel and flexibility of whipcord. I am not a big man, nearly two inches under six feet, but at that time I had never met a man who could beat me in any trial where strength, endurance, or agility was needed. But these would not satisfy the examiners, so I gave up all thought of getting into the army that way.

I tried the ranks, therefore, and joined a regiment in which a couple of brainless family men had enlisted as a step towards a commission. But I was only in for six months ; and my surprise is that I stopped so long.

For a few years I was at a loose end altogether—a man of action without a sphere. Then I fell madly in love with my best friend's sister, Edith Ballestier. I cursed my folly in wasting my life, and filled the air with vows that I would set to work to increase my income of £250 a year to an amount such as would let me give her a home worthy of her. She loved me. I know that. But her mother didn't ; and in the end, the mother won. Edith

tossed me over ruthlessly, while I was away for a couple of months ; and all in a hurry she married another man for his title and money.

It was only the old tale. I knew that well enough, but it seemed to break my last hope. Everything I'd ever really wanted, I'd always failed to get. I was like a lunatic, and vowed I'd kill myself after I'd punished the woman who'd done worse than kill me.

I thought out a scheme and played it shrewdly enough. I shut the resolve out of sight, and laughed and giped as though I felt no wound. And I waited. The chance came surely enough. I went down to a place a bit out of town and took my revolver with me. After a dance I led my Lady Cargill out into the shrubbery and when she least suspected what I was about, whipped out the weapon and told her what I was going to do. She knew me well enough to feel I was in deadly earnest ; but she made no scene, such as another woman might. Her white beauty held my hand an instant, and in that time her husband, Sir Philip, came out. Then I had a flash of genius. I knew he was as jealous as a man could be ; and as he had known nothing of my relations with Edith, like many another self sufficient idiot, he imagined she had loved him and no one else. I opened his eyes that night. Keeping him in control with the pistol, I made him hear the whole story of her love for me from her own lips ; and I shall never forget how the white of his craven fear changed to the dull gray of a sickened heart as he heard. At a stroke it killed my desire to kill. I had had a revenge a thousand times more powerful. I had made the wife see the husband's craven poltroonery, and the husband the wife's love for another ; and I let them live for their mutual distrust and punishment.

A month later I stood on the Moscow platform, my back turned on England forever, my face turned warwards, and my heart ready for any devilment that might offer, when my fate was tossed topsy turvy into a caldron of welcome dangers, promising death and certainly calculated to give me that distraction from my own troubles which I desired so keenly.

It was clear that Alexis has so far been known as a very different man from the kind that produces good soldiers ; but men sometimes reform suddenly, and the new Alexis would be cast in quite a different mold. The difficulty was to invent a pretext for the sudden change ; and in regard to this a good idea occurred to me.

I resolved to say that I had had an ugly accident and a great fright, and to connect it with the shaving of my beard and mustache, and pretend furthermore that the mishap had wrought as complete a change in my nature as in my appearance ; as if my brain had been in some way affected. I mapped out a very boldly defined course of eccentric conduct which would not be altogether inconsistent with some such mental disturbance. I would be moody, silent, reserved, and yet subject to gusts and fits of uncontrollable passion and anger ; desperate in all matters touching courage, and contemptuously intolerant of any kind of interference. I knew that my skill with the sword and pistol would soon win me respect and a reputation, while any mistakes I made would be set down to eccentricity. I was drawing from life—a French officer stationed at Rouen : evidently a man with a past which no one ever

dared to question. I calculated that in this way I should make time to choose my permanent course.

I soon had an opportunity of setting to work.

The officer who as Olga had told me was to be my chief second in the morning, Lieutenant Essaieff, came to see me. He was immensely surprised at the change in my appearance, scanned me very curiously and indeed suspiciously, and asked the cause.

"Drink or madness?" he put it laconically, in that tone of contempt with which some speak to a distrusted servant or a disliked acquaintance.

Even my friends held me cheap, it seemed.

"Neither drink nor madness, if you please," said I, very sternly, eying him closely, "but a miracle."

"And which of the devils is it this time, Petrovitch?" he asked, laughing lightly. "Gad, he must have been hard put to it. Let's have the tale." He laughed again; but the mirth was not so genuine this time, and I could see that the effect of the fixed stare with which I regarded him began to tell.

"I'm in no mood for this folly," said I, very curtly. "Save for a miracle, I should be a dead man. That's all. And I'll thank you not to jest about it."

He was serious now and asked, "How did it happen?"

I made no answer, but sat staring moodily out in front of me, and yet contriving to watch him as he eyed me furtively now and again, in surprise at the change in me.

"Are you ill, Petrovitch?" he asked at length.

"Death and fury!" I burst out, with the utmost violence, springing to my feet. "What is it to you?" And then with complete inconsequence I added: "I was praying, and in answer a light flashed on me and would have consumed me wholly, but for a miracle. Half my clothes and my face hair were consumed—and I was changed."

"Ah, prayer's a dangerous thing when you've a lot of arrears to make up," he said with a sneer.

I turned and looked at him coldly and threateningly.

"Lieutenant Essaieff, you have been good enough to lend me your services for this business tomorrow morning, but that gives you no title to insult me. After tomorrow you will be good enough to give me an explanation of your words."

He had risen and stood looking at me so earnestly that I half thought he suspected the truth. But he did not.

"You will not be alive to demand it," he said at length, contemptuously, clipping the words short in a manner that showed me how angry he was and how much he despised me. "I'm only sorry I was fool enough to be persuaded to act for you," he added as he swung out of the room.

I laughed to myself when he had gone, for I saw that I had imposed on him. He thought I was half beside myself with fear. Evidently I had an evil smelling reputation. But I would soon change all that, I thought, as I set to work to examine all the papers and possessions in the rooms. I was engaged in this work when my other second arrived. He was Ugo Gradensk,

and was a very different kind of man, and had been a much more intimate friend. He had heard of my accident and had come for news.

A glance at him filled me with instinctive disgust.

"What's up, Alexis?" was his greeting. "That prig Essaieff has just told me you're in a devil of a funny mood, and thinks you're about out of your mind with fear. What the mischief have you done to yourself?" He touched his chin as he spoke.

"Can't I be shaved without setting you all cackling with curiosity? I had half my hair burnt off and shaved the other half." He started at my surly tone and I saw in his eyes a reflection of the other man's thoughts.

"D'ye think you'll be a smaller mark for Devinsky's sword? It's made a devil of a difference in your looks I must say. And in your manners, too," I heard him mutter this last sentence into his mustache.

"Do you think I mean for an instant to allow that bully's sword to touch me?" I asked, scowling angrily.

"Well, you thought so last night when I was giving you that wrinkle with the foils—and that was certainly why you got this infernal duel put off for a day."

"Ah, well, I've been fooling you, that's all," said I shortly. "I've played the fool long enough, too, and I mean business. I've taken out a patent." I laughed grimly.

"What in thunder d'ye mean? What patent?"

"A new sword stroke. The saber stroke, I call it. Every first rank swordsman has one," I cried boastfully.

"First rank swordsman be hanged. Why, you can't hold a candle to me. And I would not stand before Devinsky's blade, not for the promise of a colonelcy. Don't be an ass."

"My cut's with the flat of the sword across the face, directly I've disarmed my man."

"And a devilish effective cut, too, no doubt, when you have disarmed him. But you'd better be making your will and putting your things in order instead of talking this sort of swaggering rubbish to keep your courage up. You know jolly well that Devinsky means mischief, and what always happens when he does. I don't want to frighten you, but hang it all, you know what he is."

"I'm going to pass the night in prayer," said I, and my visitor laughed boisterously at this.

"If you confess all we've done together, old man, you'll want a full night," he said.

"The prayers are for him, not for me," and at that he laughed more uproariously than before, and he began to talk of a hundred dissipated experiences we had had together. I let him talk freely as it was part of my education, and he rattled on about such a number of shameful things that I was disgusted alike with him and with the beast I was supposed to be. At length, to my relief, he stopped and asked me to go across to the club for the last night.

I resolved to go, thinking that if I were in his company it would seem

appropriate, and I wished to paint in more of the garish colors of my new character among my fellow officers. I made myself very offensive the moment I was inside the place. I swaggered about the rooms with an assumption of insufferable insolence. Whenever I found a man looking askance at me—and this was frequently enough—I picked him out for some special insult. I spoke freely of the “miracle” that had happened to me, and the change that had been effected. I repeated my coarse silly jest about praying all night for my antagonist, and I so behaved that before I had been in the place an hour, I had laid the foundations of enough quarrels to last me a month if I wished to have a meeting every morning.

“Ah, he knows he’s going to die tomorrow, so he does this,” said one man in my hearing. “It’s no good challenging a man under sentence of death,” said another; while a number of others held to Essaieff’s view—that I was beside myself with fear, or drink, or both combined. I placed myself at the disposal of every man who had a word to say, but the main answer I received was an expression of thanks that after that night I should trouble them no more.

I left the place, hugely pleased with the result of the night’s work. I had created at a stroke a new part for Alexis Petrovitch, and prepared every one to expect and think nothing of any fresh eccentricities or further change they might observe in me in the future.

I reached my rooms in high spirits, and sat down to overhaul the place for papers, and to learn something more of myself than I at present knew.

CHAPTER IV.—THE DUEL.

THE discoveries I made were more varied and interesting than agreeable, and I found plenty of evidence to more than justify my first ill impressions of Olga’s real brother. It was time indeed that there should be a change.

The man must have gone off without even waiting to sort his papers. Rummaging in some locked drawers, the keys of which I found in a little cabinet that I broke open, I came across a diary with a number of entries with long gaps between them, which seemed to throw a good deal of light on my past.

There were indications of three separate intrigues, which I was apparently carrying on at that very time. I found that a number of appointments of all kinds were fixed for the following afternoon. The initials of the persons only were given, but enough particulars were added to show the nature of the business. Thus some one was coming for a bet of 1,000 rubles; a money lender was due who had seemingly declared that he would wait no longer; and quite a number of tradesmen for their bills.

I soon saw the reason for all this. I was evidently a fellow with a turn for a certain kind of humor; and I had obviously made the appointments in the full assurance either that Devinsky’s sword would have squared all earthly accounts in full for me, or that I should be safe across the frontier and out of my creditors’ way.

I recalled with a chuckle my words to Olga—that if I were to play the

part I must play it thoroughly. 'This meant that not only must I fight the beggar's duel for him, but if I were not killed fence with his creditors also, or pay their claims.

I swept everything at length into one of the biggest and strongest drawers, locked them up, and sat down to think for a few minutes before going to bed. If I fell in the morning I wished Rupert Balestier to hear of it; and the only means by which that could be done would be for me to write a note and get Olga to post it. Half a dozen words would be enough. This is what I finally wrote:

MY DEAR RUPERT:

The end has come much sooner than I hoped when writing you this afternoon. A queer adventure has landed me in a duel for tomorrow morning with a man who is known as a good swordsman. He may prove too much for me. If so, good by, old friend, and so much the better. It will save an awful lot of trouble; and the world and I are quite ready to be quit of each other. The receipt of this letter posted by a friendly hand will be a sign to you that I have fallen. Again, good by, old fellow. H. T.

I didn't put my name in full, to lessen the chance of complication should the letter go astray. I addressed it, and then put it under a separate cover. Next I wrote a short note to my sister; and this had to be ambiguously worded, lest it also should get into the wrong hands

MY DEAR SISTER:

You know of my duel with Major Devinsky and that it is an honor unavoidable. Should I fall, I have one or two last words. I have many debts; but had arranged to pay them tomorrow; and I have more than enough money in English bank notes for the purpose. Pay everything and keep for yourself the balance, or do with it what you think best. My money could be used in no better way than to clear up entirely this part of my life. I ask you to post the inclosed letter to England; and please do so without even reading the address. This is my one request.

God bless you, Olga, and find you a better protector than I have been able to be.

Your brother,

ALEXIS.

Then I sealed up and inclosed the whole in an envelope together with about £2,000 in bank notes which I had brought with me from England. The envelope I addressed to my "sister," and determined to ask my chief second, Lieutenant Essaieff, to give it to Olga, should I fall.

One other little task I had. I went through my clothes and my own few papers and carefully destroyed every trace of connection with Hamylton Tregethner, so that there should be nothing to complicate the matter of identity in the event of my death.

So far so good—if Devinsky killed me. But what if I could beat him?

The quarrel was none of mine. I had no right to go out and even fight a man in an assumed character, to say nothing of killing him. Look at the thing as I would, I could make nothing else than murder of it.

The man was doubtless a bully, and he seemed willing to use his superior skill to fix a quarrel on Olga's brother and kill him, in order to leave the girl without protection. But his blackguardism was no excuse for my killing him. I had no right to interfere. I had never seen her or him until the last few hours; and however much Major Devinsky deserved punishment, I had no authority to administer it.

Possibly if the man knew how I could use the sword he would never have dreamed of challenging me; and I could not substitute my exceptional skill for Olga's brother's lack of it and so kill the man, without being in fact, whatever I might seem in appearance, an assassin.

If I were to warn him before the duel that a great mistake had been made as to my skill, I shouldn't be believed. He and others would only think I was keeping up the braggart conduct of that evening at the club. At the same time, I liked the idea of the warning. It would at any rate be original, especially if I succeeded in beating the major. But it was clear that I could not kill him.

All roads led round to that decision; and as I had come to the end of my cigar and there was plenty of reason why I should have as much sleep as possible, I went back to bed and slept like a top till my man, Vosk, called me early in the morning and told me that Lieutenant Gradensk was already waiting for me.

"That beggar, Essaieff, has gone on to the Common"—this was where we were to fight. "Told me to tell you. Suppose he doesn't care to be seen in our company. I hate the snob," he said when I joined him.

"So long as he's there when I want him, it's enough for me," said I so curtly that my companion looked at me in some astonishment.

"Umph, don't seem over cheerful this morning, Alexis. Must perk up a bit and show a bold front. It's an ugly business this, but you won't help yourself now by——"

"Silence," I cried sharply. "When I'm afraid, you may find courage to tell me so openly. At present it's dangerous."

Then I completed my few preparations in absolute silence, both Gradensk and the servant watching me in astonishment. When I was ready, I turned to Vosk.

"What wages are due to you?" I asked sharply. He told me, and I paid him, adding the amount for three months beside. "You leave my service at once. I have no further need of you." I was in truth anxious to get rid of him.

"My things are here. I——" he began, obviously making excuses.

"I give you five minutes to take what is absolutely necessary. The rest you can have another time. You will not return here."

"Do you suspect——" he began again.

"I only discharge you," I returned curtly. "Half of one of your minutes is gone."

He looked at me a moment, fear mingled with his utter astonishment, and then went out of the room.

Five minutes later I locked the doors behind us and put the keys in my pocket.

"What has he done, Alexis? Isn't it rather risky? You have been so intimate——" said Gradensk, as soon as we were in the drosky.

"It is I who have done this, not he," I answered sharply. "It is my private affair, if you please."

"Blast your private affairs," he cried in a burst of temper. "Even if

you are going to die, there's no reason why you should behave like a sullen dog."

I stared round at him coldly.

"After the meeting I shall ask you to withdraw that, Lieutenant Gradensk;" and we did not exchange another word till the place appointed was reached.

We were the last to arrive; and there appeared to have been some doubt as to whether I should dare turn up, I think; for I caught a significant gesture between my opponent's seconds.

How I looked I know not; but I felt very dangerous, and I tried to be perfectly calm, self possessed, and natural in my manner.

"Lieutenant Essaieff," I said, drawing my chief second on one side after I had saluted the others, "there are two matters to be mentioned. If I should fall, will you give this letter with your own hands immediately to my sister?"

"You have my word on that," he said, bowing gravely.

"One thing more. I have an explanation to make to my opponent, Major Devinsky, which I think should be made in the hearing of all."

"An apology?" he asked, with a slight curl of the lip.

"No, but an explanation without which this duel cannot take place."

He went to Devinsky's seconds, and then returning fetched me and Gradensk, who was very nervous. I went up to the other group and spoke very quietly but firmly.

"Before the duel takes place, Major Devinsky, I must make such an explanation as will prevent its being fought under a mistake. I am a much more expert swordsman than is currently known. I have purposely concealed my skill during the months I have been in Moscow but I cannot engage with you now, without making the fact known. I have indeed rather drawn you into this affair, and I now desire you to join with me in declining to carry the dispute further. After this explanation, and at any future time I shall of course be at your disposal."

The effect of this short speech was pretty much what might have been expected. All the men thought I was trying to get out of the fight by impudent bragging, and Devinsky's seconds laughed sneeringly.

I turned away as I finished speaking, but a minute later, Essaieff brought me a message—and the contempt rang in his tone as he delivered it.

"Major Devinsky's reply to your extraordinary request is this: the only terms on which he will let you off the fight are an unconditional compliance with the condition he has already named to you. What is your answer?"

"We will fight," I replied shortly; and forthwith threw off my coat and vest and made ready.

I eyed my antagonist with the keenest vigilance during the minute or two the seconds took in placing us, and I saw a certain boastful confidence in his looks and a swagger in his manner, which were eloquent of the cheap contempt in which he held me—a sentiment that was shared by all present.

My second, Essaieff, manifestly did not like his task; but he did every-

thing in a workmanlike way, which showed me he knew well what he was about, and in a very short time our swords were crossed and we had the word to engage.

An ugly glint in the major's eyes told me he had come out to kill if he could; and the manner in which he pressed the fight from the outset showed me that he thought he could finish it off straight away.

He was a good swordsman—I could tell that the instant our blades touched—and he had one or two pretty tricks which waited watching and would be sure to have very ugly consequences for any one whose eye and wrist were less quick than his own. As he fought I could readily see how he had gained his big reputation, and had so often left the field victorious after only a few minutes' fighting.

But he was not to be compared with me. In two minutes I knew precisely his tactics, and at every point I could outfight him. I had no need even to exert myself. After a few passes, all my old love of the art came back to me, and all my old skill; and when he made his deadliest lunges I parried them without an effort, and could have countered with fatal effect.

I wished to get the fullest measure of his skill, however, and for this reason did not attempt to touch him for some minutes. Then an idea occurred to me. I would prove to the men with us that I had no real wish to avoid the fight. Intentionally I let my adversary touch my left arm, drawing a little blood.

They stopped us instantly, and then came the question whether enough had been done to satisfy the demands of honor. Had I chosen, I could, without actual cowardice, have declared the thing finished; but I intended them all to understand that I had to the full as keen an appetite as my opponent for the business. I was peremptory therefore in my demand to go on.

In the pause I made my plan. I would cover my adversary with ridicule by out fencing him at all points, play with him, in fact, and give him a hundred little skin wounds to show him and the rest how completely he had been at my mercy.

I did it with consummate ease. My sword point played round him as an electric spark will dart about a magnet, and he was like a child in his feeble efforts to follow its dazzling swiftness. Scarcely had we engaged before I had flicked a piece of skin from his cheek. The next time it was from his sword arm. Then from his neck, and after that from his other cheek, until there was no part of his flesh in view which had not a drop of blood to mark that my sword point had been there. The man was mad with baffled and impotent rage.

Then I put an end to it. After the last rest I put the whole of my energy and skill into my play, and pressed him so hard that any one of the onlookers could see I could have run him through the heart half a dozen times; and I finished by disarming him with a wrench that was like to break his wrist.

To do the man justice, he had pluck. He made sure I meant to kill him, but he faced me resolutely enough when I raised my sword and put the bloody point right at his heart.

"One word," said I sternly. "I have put this indignity on you because of the insolent message you sent to me by Lieutenant Essaieff. But for that I would simply have disarmed you at once and made an end of the thing. Now, remember me by this——" I raised my sword and struck him with the flat side of it across the face, leaving an ugly red trail.

Then I turned on my heel and went to where my seconds stood, lost in staring amazement at what I had done. I put on my clothes in silence, and as I glanced about me I saw that the scene had created a powerful impression upon everybody present.

All men are irresistibly influenced by skill such as I had shown, and the utter humbling of a bully who had ridden rough shod over the whole regiment and everybody else was agreeable enough now that it had been accomplished. My own evil character was forgotten in the fact that I had beaten the man who had beaten everybody else and traded on his deadly reputation.

Lieutenant Essaieff came to me as I was turning to leave the place alone. He gave me back the letter I had intrusted to him, and after a momentary hesitation, said :

"Petrovitch, I did you an injustice, and I am sorry for it. I thought you were afraid, and I had no idea that you had anything like such pluck and skill. I believed you were blustering, and I apologize to you for the way in which I brought Devinsky's message. But for what happened last night in your rooms"—and he drew himself up as he spoke—"I am at your service if you desire it."

"I'd much rather breakfast than fight with you tomorrow morning, Essaieff, if you won't think me a coward for crying off the encounter."

"After this morning no one will ever call you a coward," said he ; and think he was a good deal relieved at not having to stand in front of a sword which could do what mine had just done. "Shall we drive back together?"

We saluted the others ceremoniously, my late antagonist scowling very angrily as he made an abrupt and formal gesture. Then I snubbed Gradensk, who looked very white, remembering what I had said to him when driving to the ground ; and Lieutenant Essaieff and I left together.

"How is it we have all been so mistaken in you, Petrovitch?" asked my companion when we had lighted our cigarettes.

"How is it that I have been so mistaken in you?" I retorted. "I choose to take my own way, that's all. I wished to know the relish of the reputation for cowardice, if you like. I have never been out before in Moscow, as you know ; and have never had to show what I could do with either sword or pistol. Nor did I seek this quarrel. But because I have never fought till I was compelled, that does not mean that I can't fight when I am compelled. But the truth's out now, and it may as well all be known. Come to my rooms for five minutes before breakfast—I am going to my sister's for that—and I'll show you what I can do with the pistols. It may prevent any one making the mistake of choosing those should there be any more of this morning's work to do."

"I hope you can keep your head," he said, after a pause. "You'll be about the most popular man in the whole regiment after today's business. I don't believe there's a more hated man in the whole city than Devinsky; and every one's sure to love you for making him bite the dust. I suppose you're coming to the ball at the Zemliczka Palace tonight. You'll be the lion."

There was a touch of envy in his voice, I think, and he smiled when I answered indifferently that I had not decided. As a fact, I didn't know whether I had any invitation or not, so that my indifference was by no means feigned.

When we reached my rooms I took him in, and as I wished to noise abroad as far as possible the fact of my skill with weapons, I showed him some of the trick shots I had learned. Pistol shooting had been with me, as I have said, quite a passion at one time, and I had practised until I could hit anything within range, either stationary or moving. More than that, I was an expert in the reflection shot—shooting over my shoulder at a mark I could see reflected in a mirror held in front of me. Indeed, there was scarcely a trick with the pistol which I did not know and had not practised.

The lieutenant had not words enough to express his amazement and admiration; and when I sent him away, after about a quarter of an hour's shooting such as he had never seen, he was reduced to a condition of speechless wonder.

Then I dressed carefully, having bathed and attended to the slight wound on my arm, and set out to relieve my "sister's" suspense and keep my appointment for breakfast. I found myself thinking pleasantly of the pretty girl, and when I saw a light of infinite relief and gladness sparkle in her eyes at sight of me safe and sound and punctual, I experienced a much more gratifying sensation than I had expected.

Her face was somewhat white and drawn and her eyes hollow, telling of a sleepless, anxious night; and she grasped my hand so warmly, and was so moved, that I could not fail to see that she had been worrying lest trouble had come to me through her action of the previous day.

"You haven't had so much sleep as I have, Olga," I said lightly.

"Are you really safe—quite safe—and unhurt? And have you really been mad enough to go out and fight that man? Oh, I could not sleep a wink all night for thinking of you and of the cruel gleam I have seen in his eyes!" And she covered her face with her hands and shivered.

"Getting up early in the morning always gives me an unconscionable appetite, Olga. I thought you knew that," said I lightly and with a laugh. "But I see no breakfast; and that's hardly sisterly, you know."

"It's all in the next room, ready," she answered, leading the way. "But tell me the news;" and her face was all aglow with eager inquiry.

"I had no difficulty with Major Devinsky. As I anticipated, he was no sort of a match for me at that business. I'm not bragging, but I've been trained in a totally different school, and—well, the beggar never had a chance."

She smiled then, and her eyes danced in gladness, but as suddenly grew grave again. Wonderfully telltale eyes they were.

"Is he hurt?"

"No, not much. Nothing serious. His quarrel wasn't with me, you see, so I couldn't kill him or wound him seriously. But you'll hear probably from others what happened."

"I want to hear from you, please. You promised the news at first hand."

"Well, I played rather a melodrama, I fear. I managed to snick him in a number of places till he's pitted a good deal. I gave him a lesson for having treated you in that way, and also for his insolence to me. Besides, I had wished to make a bit of an impression on the other men there. He won't trouble us again, I fancy."

"He's dangerous, Alexis; mind that. Very dangerous. But oh, I'm so glad it's all over and you're safe and sound. And here's your favorite dish, though you don't know what it is."

"I don't care what it is. I'll take whatever you give me on trust." At that she glanced at me and colored and hung her head.

She was very pretty indeed when the color glowed in her cheeks; and as a rather long silence followed I had plenty of time to observe her. She made a most captivating little hostess, too, and I began to feel that if I had had such a sister of my own I should have been remarkably fond of her, and perhaps—who can tell?—a very different man myself.

"By the way, there's one thing you must be careful to say," I said, breaking a long pause that was growing embarrassing. "You will probably be asked whether you knew that I was an expert with the sword and pistol, and was purposely concealing my skill from the men here in Moscow. That's what I've said, and it may be as well that you should seem to have known it. A brother and sister should have no secrets from each other, you know."

She shook her head at me, and with a smile and in a tone of mock reproach said:

"You haven't always thought that, Alexis."

"It's never too late to mend," returned I. "And I'll promise for the future, if you like—so long as the relationship lasts, that is."

To that she made no answer, and when she spoke again she had changed the subject.

We chatted very pleasantly during breakfast, and I asked her presently about the dance at the Zemliczka Palace. She was going to it, she said, and told me that I had also accepted.

"Can a brother and sister dance together, Olga," I asked.

"I don't know," she replied, playing with the point as though it were some grave matter of diplomacy. "I have never had to consider the question practically because you have never asked me, Alexis. But I think they might sit out together;" and with the laugh that accompanied that sentence ringing in my ears, like the refrain of a sweet song, we parted.

CHAPTER V.—GETTING DEEPER.

THE news that I had beaten Devinsky, had played with him like a cat with a bird, spread like a forest fire. Essaieff was right enough in his fore-

caste that every one would be delighted at the major's overthrow. But the notoriety which the achievement brought me was not at all unlikely to prove a source of embarrassment.

I should be a marked man and everything I did would be sure to be closely observed. Any gross blunder made in my new character would be more certainly seen, and would thus be all the more likely to lead to my discovery.

There were of course a thousand things I ought to know; hundreds of acts that I had no doubt been in the habit of doing regularly—and thus any number of pitfalls lay gaping right under my feet.

My difficulties began at once with my regimental duties. I did not know even my brother officers by sight, to say nothing of the men. The fact that the real Alexis had not been very long with the regiment would of course help me somewhat in regard to this, as it was quite conceivable that having been very indifferent to my duties and anything but a zealous officer, I might not have got to know the men. But I was just as ignorant of the regimental routine, which ought to be a matter of course. I had questioned Olga on every detail and drawn from her all that she knew—and she was surprisingly quick witted and well informed on the subject—and I had of course my own limited military experience to back me; but I lacked completely that familiarity which only actual practice could give. This difficulty gave me much thought, and I am bound to say amused me immensely. The way out that I chose was a mixture of impudence and eccentricity; and I relied on the reputation I had suddenly made for myself as a swordsman being sufficient to silence criticism.

I went back to my rooms, and while there a man servant whom Essaieff had promised to send me, arrived. I would not have one from the ranks, but chose a civilian that had been a soldier; and under the guise of questioning his present knowledge of military matters, dress, etc., I drew out of him particulars of the uniforms I ought to wear on different occasions, the places and times of all regimental duties, and what was of even more importance a rough idea of the actual duties which fell to the share of Lieutenant Alexis Petrovitch.

That was enough for me. I dressed and went to headquarters, resolved to see the colonel and, on the plea of indisposition, ask to be excused from duty on that and the following day. To my surprise—for I had heard from Olga that I stood very low down in Colonel Kapriste's estimation—I was received with especial cordiality and favor. His greeting was indeed effusive. He granted my request at once, said I could take a week if I liked, after my hard work, and declared that I must take great care of myself for the sake of the regiment. Then he pressed me to wait until he had finished his regimental work as he wished to talk to me.

What he wanted was an account of the duel, and a very few minutes showed me that if he was no friend of mine, he was a strong enemy of the man I had fought. He questioned me also as to the change in my appearance, why I had shaved my beard and mustache, what excuse I had to give for having been out without my uniform on the previous day; and my blunt

reply that I had had an accident and hoped I was master of my features, and that if my uniform was burnt it was more becoming for an officer to be in mufti than naked, drew from him nothing more than the significant retort that he hoped I had changed as much in other respects. Then he turned curious to know where I had learned to use the sword and who was the fencing master that had taught me; and I turned the point with a laugh that Major Devinsky's evil genie conferred the gift on me, as they were not yet ready below to take charge of the major's soul.

He was so delighted with my success over the man whom he evidently hated, that he let my impertinence pass; but I could see that the two aides who were present were as much astonished at my conduct as at the colonel's reception of it.

But it was of great service to me. It emphasized the complete change in me; and I left with a feeling of intense satisfaction that the difficulties of the position were proving much less formidable when faced than they had seemed in anticipation.

I went next to the exercise ground and watched with the closest scrutiny everything that took place. Now and again one or other of the officers came up to me; and to all alike I adopted an attitude of cold and stolid impassiveness. This was my safe course. I knew that Alexis had hitherto been unpopular with the whole regiment, except perhaps with one or two of the worst and wildest fellows; and I judged that any approaches made now were rather out of deference to the dangerous skill I had suddenly developed than to any old familiarity. In most cases I could therefore quite safely appear to resent old neglect and so repulse any present advances.

"You're not at drill, this morning, Petrovitch," said one.

I gave him a stony, stolid stare.

"On the contrary, I am here," I answered, turning away.

"I mean, you're not drilling," he said, with a feeble laugh.

"I have already been out this morning," I returned, giving him another most unpleasant look. "Do you mean that you want to drill with me?" I stared him out of countenance until the feeble laugh which he repeated had passed from his face, and with a muttered excuse he went back to his men.

This sort of thing, with variations in my hard unpleasantness, happened several times while I remained on the ground; and before I left I managed to stamp the impression pretty clearly on my fellow officers generally that it would be best not to interfere with me. This was just what I wished.

At the club where I went after leaving the exercise ground, there were several of the men whom I had so insulted on the previous night. I was in truth rather sorry that I had made such a cad of myself; since that was not the sort of character I saw now I could construct out of the composite materials of the two very different careers and persons that were now to be blended.

My reputation was made already, and I found everywhere some evidences of the advantages it carried. More than one of those who on the night before had been most profuse in their expressions of contempt for me were now obviously very ill at ease; and some of them were unquestionably expecting

me to take a strong course. But I spoke to no one; and merely returned a curt and formal acknowledgment of any greetings made to me.

After a time Lieutenant Essaieff came in, and I noticed not without satisfaction that as soon as he saw I was in the place he came across to me.

"I hear you have made a remarkable conversion, Petrovitch."

"Yes?"

"Old Saltpetre, I mean. Cruladoff told me and said he could scarcely believe his own eyes and ears when you and that old martinet were chumming together like a couple of young subs. He swears that a man has been cashiered before now for saying a good deal less than you did." I saw he was referring to the chief, so I made a shot.

"It's not much of a secret what he thinks of Devinsky."

"Do you really know the story, then? Why, you told me last week that you didn't."

"I didn't know a good deal then that I know now," I returned drily.

"Neither did we," he answered significantly. "Any way, the old boy swears by you now; and after you'd left this morning went on in a fine strain to the two aides, praising you sky high. By gad, if the war really comes, you'll be in luck and get every bit of daredevil work the old salamander can thrust your way. Hullo, Cruladoff," he broke off, as one of the men I had seen that morning with the chief came up. "I was just telling Petrovitch what you told me."

Some others joined us then, and though I held myself in the strongest reserve, I exchanged a few words with one or two. What was of great importance, moreover, I learned to know a number of my comrades by sight and name.

My actions were all carefully studied. I spoke very little indeed; never dropped a word that had even a suggestion of boastfulness in it, and only answered when any man chose to address me. I knew from what Olga had told me that I was with some of the best men in the regiment—those who hitherto had held me in the poorest esteem—and I was scrupulously careful that in my outward demeanor there should now be nothing whatever to cause offense. I would allow no man to interfere with or even criticise me—but on my side I would interfere with none. The eccentricity that was to cover my ignorance should be defensive armor only.

In this manner I carried myself through the difficulties of that day; and it was indeed easy enough. I found most of my comrades only too ready to be civil rather than suspicious; and the extraordinary success of the morning set them on the lookout for further eccentricities and peculiarities. A man who could successfully conceal the possession of such extraordinary skill with sword and pistol, might be expected to have any number of surprises in store; and no one was in any hurry to ask the reason for the concealment.

The fame of my achievement affected even the men who came to have their debts paid that afternoon and evening—and the money lender—a scurvy wretch of the lowest type—was so frightened and trembled so violently when I asked him how he dared to send me threatening letters, that he could

scarcely sign his receipt. The whole of them were certainly profoundly astonished at getting their money; and probably I should not have paid a kopeck, but for a change in my intentions that had begun to affect me.

I liked the promise of the new life for which I had exchanged my old and empty career; and I had begun to consider whether, instead of leaving when my passport came, I should not remain where I was and continue to be Lieutenant Alexis Petrovitch of the Moscow Infantry Regiment.

I had already done much to make a title to the position. I had saved the real man's body by helping him over the frontier; I had saved his honor by fighting his duel for him; I had made his sister pretty safe from further molestation at Devinsky's hands; I had created quite a new Alexis Petrovitch in the regiment; and now I had paid the beggar's debts.

Obviously I could play the part a good deal better than he could, and therefore why not continue to play it? There was plenty of danger in it. Siberia at least if it was discovered that I had been personating a Russian officer and fighting duels in his name. But I cared nothing for that. If it threatened me, it had its compensations; since it made it quite impossible for the real Alexis ever to return and claim his position, even if he wished.

I had intended to fight for Russia in any event, supposing the war came; and if I fell in some battle it would not matter in the least how my grave was ticketed. It might save me no end of trouble, moreover, if I took the goods the gods gave me without bothering any more about volunteering.

The more I thought of it as I sat and smoked by myself, the firmer became my resolve just to float with the stream and remain what I was, till chance discovered me, if ever it did.

I had probably got over the worst part by my impudence, my knack of fighting, and the extraordinary resemblance to my other self; and already I could see my way through many of the difficulties, so far as the regiment was concerned.

Moreover, I am bound to admit I liked the part. I had never had such a chance before; and if all the truth must be told, my vanity was not altogether proof against the sensation I was creating. I had had such a run of bad luck for the past few years, that such a change was welcome.

By the time my reverie was finished, therefore, I had more than half resolved to be Hamylton Tregethner no more. Then it was time to dress for the ball at the Zemliczka Palace; and I was snob enough—I can call it nothing but sheer snobbery—to time my entrance into the rooms as to cause as much sensation as possible. Though outwardly calm and quite impassive, I am positively ashamed to say I enjoyed the ripple of comment which I saw pass from lip to lip, and the evident interest which I awakened.

At the same time matters were within an ace of being very awkward. Any number of people came forward to speak to me, all of whom manifestly expected I should know them both by name and by sight. I had one greeting for all: cold, impassive, uninterested; there were a number of very handsome women with whom I should have been glad to chat, if I could have done so safely. But I dared not.

Indeed, the women worried me more than enough. The men I could

stave off and keep at a distance easily; for in truth they all seemed shy of forcing themselves on me; but the women wanted to compel me to take notice of them, and were not to be put off by any excuse or shift. How many I ought to have known, with how many I had had flirtations, I of course had not the remotest idea. I was thus very glad when I saw a chance of escape come with the entrance of Olga, with her aunt. The latter was rather a good looking woman, I thought; and I got away from the other people on the plea of having to go and speak to the two.

"Well, aunt, what do you think——" I began.

"Aunt?" exclaimed Olga's companion, looking at me with unmistakable anger.

My sister flashed a quick danger signal at me. I had blundered badly.

"Alexis, your joke is very ill timed," she said severely. "You should know the Countess Krapotine better than to suppose that your barrackyard gibes would be welcome."

"I hope the Countess Krapotine knows there is no one in all Moscow whose good will I prize more highly and would lose more unwillingly than hers. It was a silly jest, and was prompted only by a desire to claim even a passing relationship with one whom Moscow delights to honor. Her kindness to you, Olga, makes her kin to me."

"You are always a little hard on your brother, Olga," said the countess, whom I had mistaken for an aunt many years older and infinitely ugly. But the matter passed, and as I did not care to stop and talk with them for too long, I left them after arranging dances I was to sit out with my sister.

I did not dance with any one, but contented myself with lounging about, observing what was going on. I had more than one little adventure, but one in particular impressed me. I was leaning against the wall near an archway between two of the ball rooms when I noticed an exceedingly handsome woman secretly making eyes and signs to some one near me. She was a remarkably striking woman, tall, dark, handsome, and passionate looking; and after a minute I glanced about me to see who the fortunate man might be. Just then there was no man at all near me, and looking furtively at her, I noticed that the signs ceased when I was apparently not observing her.

I looked at her openly, and they recommenced immediately. It seemed, therefore, that they were meant for me. I tested this, until there was no room for doubt, and I looked at her with a little more interest, speculating who she might be, and what she was to me. But I made no sign that I knew her, as of course I did not, and after a minute or two I moved away, as it was time for me to go to Olga.

There was just then a little difficulty in getting through the rooms owing to the crush of people, and presently to my intense surprise a very angry voice whispered close in my ear:

"Beware."

I turned at once and found it was the handsome woman who had been signaling to me. The crowd had brought us close together, and she was staring hard at me, her face expressive of both agitation and ill temper. I was amused, and without relaxing my features bowed as I muttered:

"I will."

This answer seemed to increase her anger, but at that instant another movement of the throng separated us, and I went away to find Olga.

We sat and chatted and laughed together—especially at my mistake with the countess—and presently glancing up I saw opposite to us the woman who had acted the little bit of melodrama with me. She was eying us both now angrily.

"Who's that?" I asked, pointing her out to my sister. The girl shook her head gravely.

"I wish you didn't know, Alexis."

"Oh, do I know? I've put my foot in it then, I expect;" and I told her what had happened. She smiled, and then shook her head again, more gravely than before.

"All Moscow knows that you and Madame Paula Tueski are thick friends; and you ought to know that you have set many scandalous tongues wagging."

"Well, she's a very handsome woman," said I, glancing across at her.

"Your favorite style of beauty was always somewhat masculine and fleshly," said Olga, in a very sisterly and very severe tone.

"Yes, I'm afraid I've not always admired these things I ought to have admired."

"Say rather, you have often admired those things which you ought not. Commission not omission."

"Well, I've a new commission now, and you gave it me," said I, playing on her word and looking closely at her. I took rather a pleasure in watching the color ebb and flow in her bright, expressive face.

She looked up now, very steadily, right into my eyes, as if to read my thoughts; and then looked down again and was silent. And in some way the look made me sorry I had jested. After a pause she said in her usual direct way.

"We are wasting time. There is so much I must tell you, and some of it is very disagreeable. You and I have quarreled more than once about that woman, Paula Tueski. You wished me to know her, and I would not; I wished you to give her up, and you would not."

"I'll do it at once," I said readily. "I shall not feel the pang."

"Do please be serious," she interrupted in her turn, with a little foot tap of impatience, while a frown struggled with a smile for the mastery in her expression. The smile had the best of it at first, but the frown won in the end. "Paula Tueski, you have often told me, is a dangerous woman. As the wife of the chief of the secret police she has considerable power and influence; though to be candid I never could tell whether you said this as an excuse for continuing your friendship with her, or because you were really afraid of her. You are not very brave, Alexis, you know."

"No, I'm afraid not," I admitted. "But at any rate, I won't try to force her on you for the future. I think I can promise that."

"She's an exceedingly ambitious woman, and means you no good, Alexis," went on Olga, very energetically. "If you can give her up safely

I hope you will." She was intensely earnest about this, and I was going to question her more closely when some one came up to claim her for a dance.

Very soon after this I left, taking care to keep out of the way of the woman who seemed so anxious that I should speak to her. I remembered a "P. T." in the diary, and I saw that there might easily be some ugly complications unless I was very careful.

I walked home to my rooms, and was very thoughtful on the way. This legacy of old sweethearts was the most unpleasant feature of my new inheritance, as well as possibly the most dangerous. It was just the kind of a knot, too, that a sword could not cut, and the next day I had a very jarring reminder of this.

CHAPTER VI.—A LEGACY OF LOVE.

THE next morning I sat smoking when my servant, Borlas, announced that a lady wished to see me. He ushered in a tall woman, closely veiled.

I rose and bowed to her; but she stood without a word until Borlas had gone out.

"Don't pretend that you don't know me," she said, in a voice naturally sweet and full and musical, but now resonant with agitation and anger.

It was a very awkward position. Obviously I ought to know her, so I thought it best to speak as if I did.

"I make no attempt at pretense with you," I said equivocally. "But aren't you going to sit down?"

"No attempt at pretense! What was your conduct last night if not pretense—maddening, infamous, insulting pretense?"

I knew her now. It was the handsome, angry woman whose signals at the ball I had ignored—Paula Tueski. She had probably come to upbraid me for my coldness and neglect. "Hell holds no fury like a woman scorned," thought I; and this was a woman with a very generous capacity for rage. If she recognized me—

"Won't you take off that thick veil, which prevents my seeing your very angry eyes. You know I always admire you in a passion, Paula." I did not know how I ought to address her, so I made the plunge with her Christian name.

"Why dared you insult me by not speaking to me at the ball last night? Why dared you break your word? You pledged me your honor"—this with quite glorious scorn—"that you would introduce your impudent chit of a sister to me at the ball. And instead, you dared to sit with her laughing and gibing and flouting at me. Pretending, you, you of all men on this earth, that you did not know me! Do you think I will endure that? Do you think—" Here rage choked her speech, and she ended in incoherency, half laugh, half sob, and all hysterical.

I was sorry she stopped at that point. The more she told me the easier would be my choice of policy. From what she said I gathered this was another of the pledges made under the fear of Devinsky's sword.

"You know that Olga is exceedingly difficult to coerce——"

"Bah! Don't talk to me of difficulties. You would be frightened by a fool's bladder, and call it difficulties. I suppose you shaved your beard and mustache because they were difficulties, eh? Difficulties, perhaps, in the way of getting out of Moscow unrecognized on the eve of a fight? You know what I mean, eh?"

For a moment I half thought she or the police agents of her husband might have guessed the truth, and this made me hesitate in my reply.

"Did you think I was afraid to kill Major Devinsky, or ashamed to let it be known that I am the best swordsman in the regiment?"

"Why have you never told me that?" she cried with feminine inconsequence. "I don't understand you, Alexis. You want me one day to get this man assassinated because you say you know he can run you through the body just as he pleases, and you promise me the friendship of your sister if I will do it; and yet the very next, you go out and meet him and he has not a chance with you. But why did you do it? I have heard of it all. Did you want to try me?"

I thanked her mentally for that cue.

"At all events two things are clear now," I said. "I did not want to get out of Moscow for fear of Devinsky, and you would not do that which I told you could alone save my life. You did not think my life was worth saving." I spoke very coldly and deliberately.

"So that is it?" she cried, with a quick return of her rage. "You insult me before all Moscow because I will not be a murderess—your hired assassin."

It was an excellent situation. If I had devised it myself, I could not have arranged it more deftly, I thought.

I shrugged my shoulders and said nothing; but the silence and the gesture were more expressive than many words.

My visitor tore off the veil she had worn till now and throwing herself into a chair looked at me as though trying to read my innermost thoughts; while I, on my part, was trying to read hers, and was more than half suspicious that she might see enough to let her jump at the truth.

But a rapid reflection showed me I should be wise to use the means she herself had supplied, as an excuse for the change in me toward her. It was dangerous of course to set at defiance a woman of her manifest force of character and in her position; but in attempting to continue even an innocent intrigue with her there was equal danger.

She remained silent a long time, considering, as it seemed to me, how she should prevent my breaking away from her. She was a clever woman, and now that the first outburst of emotion was over, she abandoned all hysterical display and resolved, as her next words proved, to appeal to my fears rather than to any old love.

She laughed very softly and musically when she spoke next.

"So you think you can do as you will with me, Alexis?"

"On the contrary," I replied, quite as gently and with an answering smile, "I have no wish to have anything at all to do with you."

"Yet you loved me once," she murmured, the involuntary closing of her eyelids being the only sign of the pain my brutal words caused.

"The sweetest things in life are the memories of the past, Paula. If you really loved me as you said, it will be something for you to remember that while you prized my life, you held my love."

"A man would starve on the memory of yesterday's dinner."

"True; or hope that somebody else will give him even a more satisfying meal."

"You could always turn a woman's phrases, Alexis."

"And you a man's head, Paula."

"Bah! I have not come here to cap sentences."

"Yet there can be little else than that between us for the future. You have shown me what store you set on my life."

"Did you think I could love you if you were such a coward that you dared not fight a duel?"

"You thought I dared not when you refused to help me."

"You said you dared not. But do you think I believed you? Could I believe so meanly of the man I loved?"

"You discussed the matter as if you believed it," said I, making a leap in the dark and blundering badly.

"Discussed it? What do you mean? With whom? Do you think I am mad? I sat down and answered your mad letter in the only way it could be answered."

Great heavens! I had apparently been fool enough in my desperate cowardice to actually write the proposal. The letter itself if she dared to use it spelt certain ruin.

"Well, you answered the test in your own way, and—— I shrugged my shoulders as a suggestive end to the sentence.

She paused a moment, looking thoughtfully at me. Then knitting her brows, she asked:

"What is the real meaning of this change, Alexis? Do try for once to be frank. You have always a half a dozen secret meanings. You have boasted of this in regard to others—perhaps because you were afraid to do anything else."

"Are you a judge of my fears? I think I have already shown you that that which I led you to believe frightened me most had in reality no terrors at all for me."

"One thing I know you are afraid of—to break with me." This came with a flash of impetuous anger, bursting out in spite of her efforts at self restraint.

I smiled.

"We shall see. I have not broken with you. It is you who have broken with me. How often have you not sworn to me," I cried passionately, making another shot, "that there was nothing on this earth that you would not do if I only asked you? What value should I set on a broken love vow?"

"Had I thought you were even in danger, I would have dared even that,

Alexis, perilous and desperate as you know such a hazard must be." She spoke now with a depth of tone that was eloquent of feeling. "What I told you is true—and you know it. There is nothing I will not do for you. Bid me do it now to show you my earnestness. Shall I leave my husband—I will do it. Shall I tell the world of Moscow the tale of my love—I will do it. Nay, bid me walk the streets of the city, calling on your name and proclaiming my love—and I will do it with a smile, glorying in my shame because it brings you to me and me to you never to part again!"

This flood of passion, spoken with such earnestness as I had never heard from the lips of woman before, was almost more than I could endure to hear without telling the truth to her. But this I dared not do, so I remained silent, and this silence she read for obstinacy. Then it was she began to show the nature of the power she held over me. I was glad of this, as it seemed to give me a sort of greater justification for my action. It was an attack, and I had to defend myself.

"You do not answer me. You are cold, moody, silent, and yet not unmoved. I wonder of what you are thinking. Yet there can be but one burden to your thoughts. You are mine, Alexis, mine; always, till death—as you have sworn often enough. And after your bravery I love you more than ever. I love a brave man, Alexis. Every brave man. I would give them the kiss of honor. And that you are the bravest of them all is to me the sweetest of knowledge. Yesterday, when I heard how you had humbled that bully, I could do naught but thrill with pride every time I thought of it. It was my Alexis who had done it. And then I began to think how glad I was that I had made it impossible for you ever to think of giving me up. I know you are brave, but even the bravest men shudder at the whisper of Siberia."

She paused to give this time to work its effect.

"I wonder how other women love; whether, like me, they think it fair to weave a net round the man they love, strong enough to hold the strongest, wide enough to reach to the poles, and yet fine enough to be unseen?" She laughed. "I have done this with you, sweetheart. You know how often you have asked me for information, and I have got it for you—you have wanted it for the Nihilists. Knowing this, I have given it, and—you have used it. Once or twice you have told them what was not true, and now you are suspected and in some danger of your life. But you are guarded also and watched. Two days ago you were at the railway station, in private clothes, and with your dear face shaven; you were trying to leave Moscow. But you probably saw the uselessness of the attempt, and gave it up. Had you really tried, you would have been stopped. Do you think you can hope to escape from me? Do you think you can break through the network of the most wonderful police system the world ever knew? Psh! Do not dream of it. Moscow is a fine, large, splendid city. But Moscow is also a prison, and the man who would seek to break out of it but dashes his breast against the drawn sword of implacable authority."

"You have a pleasant humor, and a light touch in your methods of wooing," said I bitterly. She had made a great impression on me.

"The wooing is complete, Alexis. It was your work. I do but guard against being deceived. Escape from Moscow being hopeless for you, you have only to remember that a word from me in my husband's ear will open for you the dumb, horrid mouth of a Russian dungeon, which will either close on you forever, or let you out, branded, disgraced, and manacled, to start on the long, hopeless march to Siberia."

I had rather admired the woman before; now I began to hate her. I could not fail to see the truth behind her words, and a flash of inspiration showed me now that the safest course I could take was to shake off the character I had so lightly assumed. But her next words bared the impossibility.

"Do you think now it is safe to break away from me? But that is not all. There is another consideration. You have drawn your sister into these Nihilist snares. You know how she is compromised. I know it, too. There are more dungeons than one in Russia. If you were in one, I would see to it that she who has scorned and flouted and insulted me was in another, with her chance also of a jaunt across the plains." The flippancy of this last phrase was a measure of her hate.

The thought of the poor girl's danger beat me. What this woman said was all true—damnably, horribly, sickeningly true.

"Have you planned all this?" I asked, when I could bring myself to speak calmly.

"No, no, heaven forbid. I had not a thought of it in all my heart; not a thought, save of love and a desire to shield you from any real danger that threatened you, till"—and her voice changed suddenly—"yesterday, when you loosed all the torrents that can flow from a jealous woman's heart. I am a woman, but I am a Russian."

"My sister's fate is nothing to me," I said callously. "She has made her bed, let her lie on it. But as for myself"—I had but one possible course: to seem to yield—"I care nothing. I am not the coward you once thought me, and my meeting with Devinsky shows you that clearly enough. But I doubted your love when you did not answer to the test I made."

"You do not doubt it now. I am here at the risk of my life; at the risk of both our lives," she said, her eyes aflame with feeling.

"This morning has been a further test, and I should not be a sane man if I doubted you now, or ever again."

At this instant a loud knock at the door of the room disturbed us both.

It was my discreet servant Borlas, the loudness of his knock being the measure of his discretion.

He said that my sister was waiting to see me.

CHAPTER VII.—A LESSON IN NIHILISM.

I WAS not a little annoyed that so soon after Olga had warned me against the wiles of Paula Tueski, she should come just when my most unwelcome lover was in my rooms. But I thrust aside my irritation—which was not against Olga—and went to her, curious to learn what had brought her to visit me.

She told me in a few sentences. A friend had been to warn her that I was in danger from the Nihilists, and that unless I took the greatest care, I should be assassinated. The poor girl was pale and agitated with alarm on my account. She wanted me to fly at once, to claim the protection of the British consulate; to proclaim my identity and get away even before my passport came from her brother.

"There is not the danger you fear, Olga," I said reassuringly. "I shall find means to avoid it. But I want to speak to you about another matter. Paula Tueski is here"—my sister shrank back and looked at me with a hard expression on her face such as I had not seen there in all our talks. Evidently she hated the woman cordially. "You are right in your estimate of her in one respect, and for the moment she has beaten me. Much as I dislike the business, we must manage to blind her eyes and tie her hands for the present—or I, for one, see none but bad business ahead."

"How comes she to be here?" asked Olga, in a voice of suppressed anger.

"I will tell you all that another time," I answered, speaking hurriedly and in a very low tone. Another point had occurred to me. "She is very bitter against you, and has been urging your brother to get you to receive her. This was to have been done last night. My apparent refusal to speak to her at all came as a crowning insult, and she was mad. There is one way in which I think we might the more easily deceive her, if you can bring yourself to do it. Come in now and let me present her to you; or let me go and tell her that you will call on her."

"Will it make things safer for you?" she asked, always thinking of the trouble into which she would persist in saying she had brought me.

"It would make them safer for you, I think."

"I care nothing for myself. She can't harm me. Do you wish it? Do you think it desirable? I will do it if you say yes." She spoke so earnestly that I smiled. Then she added: "Ah, it is so good to have some one that I can trust. That's why I leave it to you."

"I don't wish it," I answered gravely, "because she is the reverse of a good woman; but I do think it would be prudent."

"Let's go to her at once," cried the girl, getting up from her chair readily. "We can talk afterwards. That's the one privilege——" She checked herself and then colored slightly. I pretended not to notice it; but this absolute confidence pleased me not a little.

"Bear in mind, we are only playing a part with this woman," I whispered.

"I know. She is too dangerous for me ever to forget that, or to play badly." She dashed a glance of quick understanding at me, and then seemed to change suddenly into a Russian *grande dame*. An indescribable air of distinction manifested itself in a hundred little signs, and she carried herself like a duchess as we entered the room where Paula Tueski sat waiting impatiently.

A great glad light of triumph leaped into the latter's eyes as she saw Olga was with me, and she, too, drew herself up as I made the two formally

known to each other. It was a delightful bit of comedy. Olga was full of quite stately regrets that she had not had the pleasure of knowing the other long before; said that her brother's friends were of course her friends; and that she hoped to call that week on Madame Tueski, and that madame would find an opportunity of returning the visit speedily. She made such an appearance of unbending to the other, that the difference between them was all the more pronounced.

Madame Tueski on her side was too full of seeming triumph over us to be able to be natural with my sister; she alternately gushed and froze as she first tried to captivate and then would remember that Olga was only consenting through compulsion to know her. The result was as ridiculous as an episode could be beneath which lurked such possibilities of tragedy.

It lasted only a few minutes when I suggested, and I had a purpose, that the two should leave the house together. I wished to get rid of Paula Tueski without further annoyance; and desired in addition that if there were any spies about the house they should see the two together, so that if any tales were carried to the chief of the police they should be innocent ones.

"I will call later in the day if possible," I promised Olga, as she left.

"Ugh, how I hate her;" was the whispered reply, inconsequential but very feminine. And I shut the door on the two and went back to my room to think out this new set of most complicated problems.

Paula Tueski's visit had changed everything; and I saw it would be foolish not to look that fact straight in the face. I could not see how things might end, but certain flight for the time was simply impossible. For myself, I did not much care. I had had a few hours of excitement which had completely drawn me out of the morbid mood in which I had arrived in Moscow; and nothing had happened to make me much more anxious to live than I had been then.

Life might have been endurable enough, if I could have gone on with my army career as Lieutenant Petrovitch, but not if the abominable and disgraceful intrigue were to be added as a necessary condition. That would be unendurable, and had I been a free agent, I would have ended the whole thing there and then, by admitting the deception and putting up with the results. Indeed, it occurred to me that in a country like Russia, where I knew that courage stood for much and military skill for more, the reputation I had managed to make would be likely enough to tell in my favor if I told the truth and asked leave to volunteer.

But was I a free agent? Look at the thing as I would I could see no means by which I could get out of the mess, even taking my punishment, without leaving my sister in deep trouble. If Paula Tueski found that I had humbugged her, and that Olga was in the plot, it was as plain as a gallows that she would be simply mad and would wreak her spite on the girl.

Could I leave Olga to this? The words of confidence she had spoken were still echoing in my ears—and very pleasant music they made—and could I quietly save my own skin and leave her in the lurch? It was not likely that I should do anything of the sort; and I didn't entertain it for a

moment as a possibility. The girl had trusted to me ; and I must make her safety the first consideration of any plan I formed.

But how? I could see only one way. It was that she should get out of Moscow, and indeed out of Russia altogether. It was not likely that the woman Tueski would place any obstacle in the way, provided I did not attempt to leave as well ; and I came to the conclusion that the best possible course would be for Olga to take her departure at once. She could go and join her brother in Paris, or wherever he had gone ; and then I could carry on alone the play—farce, burlesque, comedy, or tragedy, as it might prove.

It was early evening before I could get round to see Olga, and then I had to spend some time with her aunt, the Countess Palitzin, an ugly, garrulous, and dyspeptic old lady, who wanted to hear all about the Devinsky business over again, and then went on to tell me of some famous duels which had happened in her young days.

When Olga and I were alone I broached the subject uppermost in my mind.

"Olga," I began, "I think it would be a good idea if you were to go away on a little tour. You have had the idea of leaving Russia, you know, and going to your brother as soon as he has made a home in Paris, or wherever he stops."

"Well?" when I paused.

"Bluntly, I think you would be safer across the frontier," and I told her my reasons at some length.

"But what of you? Do you think I do not wish to share the success which my brother is enjoying here? Or are you thinking of leaving Russia also?" By a swift turn of the head she prevented me from seeing her face as she asked this.

I laughed as I answered lightly, "No. The state of my health, combined with regimental duties, social engagements, Nihilistic contracts, and other complications render it a little difficult to leave at present."

The girl did not laugh, however, but kept her face turned from me, and I could not help but admiring the poise of the head and the graceful outline it made against the gray evening light falling on her from the window. She seemed so much more womanly than the laughing girl I had met first on the Moscow platform, and it was difficult to think that so short a time had passed since then. I filled up the long pause during which she appeared to be making up her mind what answer to give me, by thinking what a pleasant sister she was, and how sorry I should be to lose her.

"Well?" I asked, when the pause had lasted a very long time.

"I am very much obliged to you for your advice," she said, turning round, and looking coldly at me, and speaking in a formal, precise tone, "but I find myself unable to take advantage of it. I cannot conveniently leave Moscow just now." Then just when I was at a loss to know how I had offended her, she changed suddenly. She stamped her foot quite angrily, a flush of indignation reddened her cheeks, and her eyes flashed as she looked at me and cried, "And I thought you understood me! Do you think we Petrovitches are all cowards? That I am like Alexis, and having got you

into this fearful trouble would run away, and leave you to get out of it alone?" For an instant she struggled with her emotion. Then she exclaimed, "It is an insult," and bursting into tears, rushed out of the room.

I stared in blank amazement at the door after it had closed behind her, and then, wondering what it was all about, left the house in a medley of confused thoughts, in which regret for having in some clumsy way worried her, and the consciousness that she was really a plucky girl, intermingled themselves with the memory of how pretty she looked in her emotional indignation. The thought of her tears, and that I had caused them, gave me the worst twinges, however, and this kept recurring and bothering me during the whole evening.

At the club, where I went from Olga's house, I was careful to maintain the same part as on the previous day: the character of a stern, reserved, observant man, moody but very resolute and determined. Not a sign of the bully nor a symptom of braggadocio; but just the kind of man who, while quite willing to let others take their own way in life, means to take his. Unready to force a quarrel, but equally unready to pass over a slight; and relentless if involved.

This was pretty much my own character, with some of the dash and life pressed out of it; and it was easy enough for me to maintain it. That night I played a little. I knew I had formerly been a pretty heavy gambler, but tonight I purposely stopped short in the full tide of winning. I had lost at first, and the luck turned with a rush, as it will, and as soon as I had pulled back my losses I stopped, to the astonishment of all who had been accustomed to find in me a heavy plunger.

I left the club, and wanting fresh air while I thought over matters, I went for a short walk. I knew the city pretty well, of course, owing to my long residence there, and the changes since I had left were not very considerable.

Walking thoughtfully down one of the broad streets, I became conscious that I was being followed. I had had a similar sensation before, but what Paula Tueski had told me about being watched and guarded, and the warning that Olga had given me, now caused me to attach more importance to the matter.

It is one of the most hateful sensations I know to feel that one's footsteps are being dogged by a spy. I turned round sharply several times, and each time noticed a man at some distance behind me trying to slip out of sight. He was clever at his business, and several feints I made in the attempt to shake him off failed. But I escaped him at length in the great Church of St. Martin. Every one knows the many outlets of that enormous pile. It has as many entrances as a rabbit warren, and most of them are nearly always open. I went in by one door and left instantly by another, and running off at top speed, I was out of sight before the spy could well know I had left the building. I seemed to breathe more freely as soon as I had shaken the fellow off.

I stayed out some time renewing my acquaintance with several parts of the city, and it was late when I reached home—so late that the streets were deserted.

This fact nearly cost me my life. I was passing a narrow thoroughfare when, without the slightest warning—though I cannot doubt that my approach had in some way been signaled—four men rushed out on me with drawn knives. By mere chance their first rush did not prove fatal; for two of them who struck at me came so close that the knives gashed my clothes.

But when they missed their chance, I did not give them another. I sprang aside, whipped out my sword, sent up a lusty cry for help that made the houses ring again, and set my back against the wall to sell my life as dearly as I could. They closed round me and attacked instantly; a swift lunge sent my blade through one of them, a swinging cut made another drop his knife with a great cry of pain, and an unexpected, but tremendously violent back handed blow with the hilt of my sword right in the face sent a third down reeling and half senseless.

This sort of reception was by no means what they had expected; and as a shout in answer to my cry for help came from a distance, the unwounded man and the two who could get away rushed off at top speed, while the fourth who had only been dazed, struggled to his feet and would have staggered off as well had I let him. But I stopped him, made him give up his knife, and then I drove him before me to my rooms—only a very short distance off—without waiting for the man to come up who had replied to my shout for help. I did not want any help now. No one man was at all likely to do me any harm, and I might thus get to know the cause of the attack, without being troubled with any outside interference.

"Now, why did you seek to kill me?" I asked sternly, as soon as the man was in my room. "You're not a thief; your dress and style show that. Why then do you turn assassin?"

"There should be no need for me to tell you that," said he, speaking with vehemence.

"Nevertheless, I ask it," I returned, with even more sternness. Evidently I was going to make another discovery; and when the man waited a long time before answering, I scanned him closely to see if I could guess his object. Clearly he was no thief. He was fairly well dressed in the style of an ordinary tradesman or a superior mechanic; his appearance betokened rather a sedentary life and his muscles had certainly not been hardened by any physical training. As certainly he was no police spy. He was the last man in the world to have been picked out for such a job as that of the attempt on my life. There was no probability of there being any private feud against me; that seemed ridiculous.

I could only conclude, therefore, that the attack was from the Nihilists. The man looked much more like an emissary of that kind—able to give a sudden thrust with a sharp knife, but incapable of doing more. The instant I had come to this conclusion, and I came to it much more quickly than I can write it, I resolved what to do.

"I am glad this encounter has taken place—not omitting the result, of course," I added grimly. "There is no cause whatever for this decree."

The man's lip curled somewhat contemptuously as I made this protest. He seemed to have formed the average low estimate of the value of my

word. Everywhere I turned I was met by the worthlessness of the scamp whose name I now bore. The contempt silenced, even while it angered me.

"You did not attend," he said curtly. "A man's absence is poor proof of either innocence or courage. You are not only a traitor, but a coward."

"What!" I turned on him as if he had struck me.

This puny, pale, insignificant weakling faced me as dauntlessly as if the positions were reversed and I was in his power, not he in mine.

"You are brave enough here now no doubt—you armed against me unarmed." He threw this sneering taunt at me with most deliberate insolence. I stared at him first in amazement, and then in admiration.

I had but to raise my hand to kill him with a stroke. He read my thoughts.

"What do I care for my life, do you think? Take it, if you like. One murder more—even in cold blood—is a little matter to a soldier."

A couple of turns up and down the room cooled me.

"I don't want your life," said I calmly. "Though it's dangerous to call me a coward, and were you other than what you are, I'd ram the word down your throat. With you, however, I'll deal differently. You say I was afraid to attend your last meeting. I'll do better than merely call that a lie, I'll prove it one. Call another meeting in as big a place as you can, pack it with all the deadliest cutthroats you can find, resolve to shoot me down as I enter the door, and if I dare not attend it, then call me coward—but not till then." My blood was up now, and I spoke as hotly as I felt.

"Will you come?" asked the man.

"Call the meeting and see. Nay, more. Between now and the time of the meeting think of the wildest and most dangerous scheme that you can to test what a desperate man can do for the cause, and give me the lead in it. And when I've failed in it, write me down traitor, and not till then. And now go, or by heaven I may forget myself and lay hands on you."

My voice rang out in such sharp, stern tones that the man's antagonism was beaten down by my earnestness. My fierceness seemed to fire him, and when I threw open the door for him to go, he stood a moment and stared into my face, his own all eagerness, light, and wildness. Then he exclaimed in a tone of intense excitement:

"I believe you're true after all." And with that he went rapidly away.

It was not until the man had been gone some time, and I was pacing up and down my room, still excited, and revolving the chances of this perhaps the most desperate of all the complications which threatened me, that I saw a letter on tinted paper, lying on my table. I took it up and found it was from Olga, and my thoughts went back with a rush to her and to the circumstances under which I had left her that evening.

The letter was not very long.

MY DEAR BROTHER:

I have not ceased to regret the hasty words I spoke to you this evening. Forgive me. Of course you do not think me a coward; and I can see now that you must have some other motive for wishing me to leave Moscow and Russia, while you remain here

alone to face—what may have to be faced. But whatever your reason is, I cannot do it. Do you understand that? I cannot. That is stronger than I will not. I think you know me. If so, you know that I will not. If I felt you thought me capable of leaving you in the lurch after having brought all this on you, I should wish I had never had—such a brother. I will never even let you mention the matter to me again.

Your sister,

OLGA.

I read this letter through two or three times, each time with a higher opinion of the stanch hearted little writer. And at the end I surprised myself considerably by involuntarily pressing the sheet to my lips.

She was a girl worth a good tough fight.

CHAPTER VIII.—THE RIVERSIDE MEETING.

THE Nihilists were not long in taking up my challenge, and on the following afternoon, the man whom I had interviewed in my rooms met me in the street and told me I was to meet him on the south side of the Cathedral Square at nine o'clock the next night. There was a peremptory ring in the message which I didn't care for, but I promised to be on hand.

I did not place the danger of attending the meeting very high. If I were not murdered on my way to the place, wherever it might be—and that was highly improbable—I did not think they would venture to kill me at the meeting itself. Moreover, I reckoned somewhat on the effect I believed I had created on the man in my rooms.

I met the man by the cathedral, and muttering to me to follow him at twenty paces' distance, he walked on, and presently plunged into a labyrinth of streets, leading from the cathedral down to the river in the lowest quarter of the town. The place was ill lit and worse drained, and the noisome atmosphere of some of the alleys was horribly repulsive.

In the lowest and darkest and dirtiest of the streets the man stopped, and with a sign to me not to speak, pointed to a dark, tumbling doorway.

The place was almost pitch dark, and as we had stepped out of a very bright moonlight, I had to stand a moment to let my eyes accustom themselves to the change. Then I made out a broken, rambling stairway just ahead of us. Taking it for granted that I was to go up these, ignorant whether I was supposed to know the place, and quite unwilling even to appear to wish to hang back, I stumbled up the steps as quickly as the gloom would let me. When I reached the top I found myself in a long, low shed that ran on some distance in front of me to a point where I thought I could discern a faint light.

I groped my way forward, the boards giving ominously under my feet, when suddenly a voice said in a loud whisper out of the gloom, and as if at my very ear: "Stand, if you value your life."

I stopped readily enough, as may be imagined, and then the silence was broken by the swishing, rushing swirl of the swiftly flowing river, while currents of cold air, caused by the moving water, were wafted up full in my face. I strained my ears to listen and my eyes to see, and craning forward, I could make out a huge gap in the floor wider than a man could have leaped.

What happened I don't know; it was too dark to see. But after a time there was a sound of a heavily moving body close at my feet, the noise of the water grew fainter, and I was told to go forward. I went on until I was again called to a halt, and after a minute the sound of the rushing water came again clear and distinct, this time from behind me. Then a flaring light was kindled suddenly and thrown down into the wide gap until, with a hiss, it was extinguished in the river below.

Without wasting time I went forward again and passing through a door which was opened at my approach, I found myself in the end room of a dis-used and tumbling riverside warehouse; the side next the river being quite open and overhanging the waters. The place was unlighted save for the bright moonlight which came slanting in from the open end, and down through some chinks and gaps in the roof.

Scattered round the place were some thirty or forty men, their faces undistinguishable in the gloom, though care was taken to let me see that each man carried a knife; and when I entered, five or six of them closed round the door, as if to guard against the possibility of my retreat.

I glanced about me to see whom to address, or who would speak to me. For a couple of minutes or more, not a soul moved and not a word was uttered. The only sounds audible were those which came from the river without and the hushed burr of night life from the dim city beyond.

"Your plea has been considered," said a voice at length in a tone scarcely above a whisper, but I thought I could recognize it as that of the man who had been in my rooms. "It has been resolved not to accept it. You have been brought here tonight to die."

"As you will, I am ready," I answered promptly. "I am as ready to lose my life as you are to take it."

"Kneel down," said the man.

"Not I," I cried resolutely. "If I am to die, I prefer to stand. But here, I'll make it easier for you. Here's the only weapon I have. Take it, some one." I laid my revolver on the floor in a little spot where a glint of moonlight fell on it. Then I threw off my coat and waistcoat, and turning back my shirt, bared the heart side of my breast. If they could be dramatic, so could I, I thought. "Here, strike," I cried in a loud whisper. "And all I ask is for a clean, quick thrust right to the heart." I was growing excited.

"No. 13," said the man, after a long pause.

A tall, broad, huge man loomed up out of a dark corner and stood between me and the light from the river. As he laid his hands on me, the clasp was like a clamp of iron and his enormous strength made me a child in his clutch. With a trick that seemed to tell of much practice, he seized me suddenly by the right arm, holding it in a grip I thought no man on earth could possess, and bending me backwards held me so that either my throat or my heart was at the mercy of the long knife he raised aloft.

Arthur W. Marchmont.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET.

A story of Colonial days in New England—What befell a captive to the red men who was trained to furnish rare sport at a feast of savage glorification.

NEHEMIAH HOPKINS was still a lad when the French and Indian War broke out, but in those perilous times children were born men; they had no time for childhood, and many a boy went out to fight who in these days would hardly have graduated from knickerbockers, and Mire, as he was called, was no exception.

The peaceful towns in New England which had begun to take on ways of maturity, and were losing the awful newness of the earlier times, were now menaced with peculiar horrors. There were still, of course, great belts of forest in every direction, which served as lurking places for the red men, and it was growing all too frequent for a village to be awakened from peaceful slumber by the wild yells of the savages, and, as their eyes opened, to see the glare of their burning dwellings, while every conceivable horror was being enacted, with those nearest and dearest as victims. As a rule, women and children were killed outright, but men and boys were captured whenever possible, and carried off into captivity.

Mire was about sixteen when, in the stillness of a summer night, the blood curdling cry was heard, and people sprang from their beds, too dazed for the moment to think what to do. But time was precious, and they were *doing* before they had a chance to think, fighting for their own lives and the lives of those dear to them.

Some of the boys sallied out in one direction, while Mire and an uncle went in another, trying to get in the rear of the howling creatures. They had nearly made the circuit of the village, and had posted themselves as to the position held by the Indians and what they were doing, and were about to return and take the women and children to a safe place in the woods, when Mire stepped on a twig that snapped under his feet. Two red men, lying prostrate as sentinels near by, crept up with the stealthiness of cats and pounced upon them; gags were placed in their mouths to prevent their outcries, and far sooner than I can tell you their hands were lashed behind them, and they were hurried away toward the densest part of the forest. Here they were tied to saplings, while their captors ran back to enjoy the horrible war dance around their victims, to the tune of their dying cries and lighted by their burning homes.

After a time which seemed endless, the savages returned, accompanied by a large number of their companions, and cutting the thongs, forced the captives to share their march of retreat. Mire and his uncle could see that there were many other prisoners, but they were kept apart, the Indians traveling in little squads, each guarding one or more whites.

When day broke they realized that they had traversed many miles. Ears of corn, still half in the milk, which had been stripped from the thriving fields near their homes, were given to them, but they were too weary and frightened to eat. Days were spent which to them were so endless, so like one to another, that soon they found themselves unable to determine whether it was days only, or weeks, months, years, since they had left home.

Sometimes they were left several days, tied to saplings, in charge of a half grown savage, while the tribe went off on a raid. These frightful young guards would revel in inflicting every conceivable kind of torture which would not really impair their captives' strength, for it was plain that they were being reserved for some special purpose. They allowed worms, bugs, spiders, every loathsome, creeping thing to be found, to crawl over their bodies, from which the clothing had been purposely removed; fires were lighted, so near as to scorch and burn the skin, inflicting dreadful suffering, because their victims were unable to move hand or foot; sticks and little stones were placed between fingers or toes, and the latter bound so strongly together that the pain rendered them quite insane for the time.

At last, after many days and weeks of alternate motion and lack of motion, they reached what proved to be a large Indian village, the headquarters of the tribe. This village, they afterwards learned, was across the border in Canada.

For a few days they were confined near each other; then Mire fell sick from the long exposure, the lack of nourishing food, and the grief of his imprisonment and separation from his family, rendered more terrible by the uncertainty of the fate of any of them.

He had been sure more than once, in the first days of their march, that he had had distant glimpses of his father, and once he saw a little girl who must have been his nine year old sister Mary being carried by a stalwart red man; but after a day or two the Indians had divided into two bands, taking different directions, and he saw them no more.

His sickness was long and severe; he lay on a blanket on the ground in one of the wigwams attended by an old squaw, and days and weeks went by which were all a blank to him. When he began to notice things again, it was evident that the warriors were all absent; only squaws and children remained, and they seemed to jabber very excitedly about something connected with this raid.

Mire had reached the point of being able to talk some with them, and tried to learn particulars, but they showed him plainly that he would not be told. Life is dear to us all, old and young, and to the latter, in particular, comes a familiarity with misfortune which makes it more endurable; then nature asserts itself, and they, perforce, grow interested in what surrounds them. As strength and health returned, Mire was allowed to walk about, and was even made to work in the fields with the women, hoeing their corn. This was far better than idleness, and saved his mind from the secondary results of all he had gone through.

He was a bright, sunny fellow, full of ingenuity and fun, and he forced his way into the hearts of these strange beings. The old woman who had

nursed him grew to show an unmistakable fondness for him, and he often talked with her about his captivity. To all inquiries concerning his whereabouts she lent a deaf ear, her only reply being that he was many moons away and could never get back; that he was her son now, for she had nursed him back to life with medicines of her own brewing which would destroy his puny white blood and make a great warrior of him.

Mire listened always eagerly, hoping to catch some word which might help him, but she was very cautious. He had long before found that the children were really ignorant of anything he wanted to know.

These little chaps were put through a series of gymnastics every day to strengthen their muscles, and Mire saw that he could not only please his old friend by going through the same maneuvers, but it would be giving him strength and knowledge which he might afterwards use to advantage in his efforts to escape. He talked with her about these exercises, got her to show him many a trick of sleight of hand or limb; to show him how to grow adroit, sharp, observing; to know the meaning of every sound in the forest; to imitate the cry or call of everything he heard, and as he worked and practised in this lore of the wild man, he was maturing very fast.

The old woman gloried in relating tales of cruelty perpetrated upon their captives; in telling of games and pastimes where the torture of some victim formed the central feature of the entertainment; of the fattening and strengthening of the same victims for weeks and months beforehand, in order that he might endure longer and so prolong the hellish amusement.

He wondered at the combination in her character of loving kindness with a maliciousness and cruelty beyond words to describe, and above all, he wondered if, in the certain fondness which she showed for him, there lurked no desire or power to save him, when his turn came, as he now felt sure it would. It was manifest that he was being reserved to glorify some special celebration of victory by the exhibition of his virile strength to resist the torture and death set down for him.

Not a point of information did he leave unprobed, even to getting instruction as to the treatment of wounds and injuries. But time passed; the warriors came and went on many a trip; other prisoners were sacrificed, as he had good reason to know, but he did not know that his escape so far had been connived at by the old woman.

He was "not fat enough"; "he had not recovered his full strength"; "he had not practised this or that feat sufficiently to furnish all the amusement of which he was capable; take some one else, and let her work him up into better condition."

By the changing of the seasons he knew that he must have been a captive for more than a year, and at last his time seemed to have come.

The warriors returned from a very successful trip, in which they had destroyed much property, and many horrible and gory scalps hung at their belts. Preparations were set on foot for a greater and more prolonged "feast" than any preceding, and victims must be furnished for each day. Scalps were plenty but captives had been few, consequently they must fall back upon their reserves, and there was no escape now for Mire.

The watch which had been kept over him had been always vigilant, but was now redoubled. Great brawny warriors would pass him frequently, stopping to feel of his flesh and the firmness of his muscle. He felt that the time had come for him to play his part in their self glorification, and yet his blood was young and ardent; life seemed sweet to him even in his captivity, for there was ever the hope of some fortunate chance of escape.

This Indian village was situated in a hollow, the sloping sides covered with forest trees of great size, while at the bottom was a natural opening, a sheltered sunny savannah, where the women raised their corn, built their wigwams and reared their young. On the heights above, the trees again fell away for a short space, and this high, breezy open on the upland was always the scene of the red men's feasts, their orgies and their sports.

Mire was more than once taken up there by his captors and led about the place. He had witnessed various methods of torture on other victims, but he now saw that he was to be subjected to still another which plainly ranked high in their estimation.

One day, after the warriors had brought him back from such a trip, the old squaw sat keeping guard over him—it was a guard, although she plainly did not wish him to think so—and she seemed to be dwelling on something in the far away past, something which roused her unusually; now she would rock back and forth, emitting groans and sighs; now she would break out into one of their strange, solemn chants; again she would rise, throw her arms aloft, and execute a grotesque sort of dance.

Mire lay on his blanket, lost in wonder, until gradually her motions grew more quiet, and she began to speak in short, disconnected sentences, one of which attracted his attention. Over and over she repeated what might be translated: "If you are spry enough, you could dash to the northerly edge of the plateau, spring down the steep side, drop under a sheltering log, old and moss covered, which hangs above one of the natural hollows with which the hillside abounds, and be lost to sight of pursuers above, who would spring over it, and across the hollow, and look for the fleeing one farther down."

She sang it, she crooned it, she chanted it, until by its very reiteration it fastened itself on his mind and he would have questioned her, but on looking up she showed such a fierce, wild face that he desisted.

The morning came at last—*his* morning—when perhaps he was seeing the sun rise for the last time. The feasting and reveling had been high, and today they would reach the grand climax. Very early he was led to the plateau and tied to a tree, where he was witness of all that went on. Huge fires were lighted at either end, over which, suspended from forked branches cut from trees, hung oxen, simply "drawn," and roasted whole in their skins, the meat being pulled off in great chunks as fast as it heated through, and eaten, dripping and disgusting. Great fitches of dried venison went from hand to hand to be "bitten from"; the women rolled corn and other succulents in husks and plunged them in the hot ashes, to be drawn out again and passed over to their lords and masters, themselves receiving only the bones and refuse disdained by the braves.

When they had eaten and drunk their fill there began a series of wild sports, showing skill in the throwing of the tomahawk and other weapons used by them. Many times one of these weapons was thrown so directly at Mire that he believed it to be the way in which he was to be finished off. This was a common pastime, each one throwing to see how near he could come and not hit, until at last one should cleave the brain.

But no ; after a while they formed into long lines, marching to and fro ; then in double lines, a continuous chain which looped around the fires at either end, while almost touching along the whole length between. All the time they kept up a monotonous chant. At last they came to a halt, the two lines facing each other, leaving barely space for one to force his way between them. Mire was led forth, and entered at one end of the lane thus formed, while a short, thick set young fellow, probably the son of a chief, was placed just in front of him, who moved backward, holding a keen, glistening tomahawk before him, its edge almost touching the face of the poor captive.

Every man on either side of this human lane held a formidable club, and the game—running the gauntlet—commenced. It was played in this way : the young savage with the tomahawk stepped backwards so slowly that every man, one on each side, striking in unison, rained blows upon Mire's naked back. Behind him walked another with upraised weapon. To dash forward or backward was to dash upon these sharp blades ; the file on either side pressed close ; there was no chance of escape. If the victim lived to reach the loop at the end of the line he came to a more terrible death, for that loop encircled the huge fire heaped high with gleaming coals.

Where could the poor boy look for help ? There was none ; he must die a prolonged, cruel, terrible death.

As blow after blow rained upon him and his agony became intense, his brain seemed to grow clear and the old woman's chant to sing and dance before his mental vision. His eye strained to look past the youngster who blockaded his path in front, and to scan every warrior. Just opposite the very side of the plateau of which the old woman sang stood in the line a youngster, probably for the first time taking his share in this pastime of warriors. Swelling with importance, he leaned a little forward from the rigid straightness of the rest.

"I can but die," thought Mire, "and here is my only chance."

The moment his vanguard passed the stripling, in the twinkling of an eye the latter was seized by Mire and hurled directly and with terrible force upon the gleaming blade, while Mire dashed through the opening and made the plunge down the steep hillside.

So new, so unexpected, so absolutely unprecedented, was this performance, that even the stoical Indian was diverted for a moment from his purpose, and the women rushed up to carry off their wounded young favorite. Foremost among these was the old squaw.

The next instant, far quicker than our time of relating it, the hue and cry was given, and the warriors went plunging down the hill in pursuit. Nothing could prevent Mire's detection and capture ; of that they were cer-

tain, and we may be sure that every brain was teeming with devices for the most diabolical punishment.

The old woman's special "cradle knoll" was exactly on the brow of the hill, and its attendant hollow directly under it. The log seemed simply held in place on the upper edge by the clinging mosses and vines which covered its decay, great masses of which were detached by the feet of the pursuers as they leaped over it, falling, of course, into the hollow, until it was so filled with such débris that it looked as though it had been always full.

With the lightning speed of one hunted to the death, Mire had scrambled to the upper side under the log, as he fell, and of course every step that crossed above him had added to his safety by adding to his covering; he was so near to the very spot from which he had escaped that it never occurred to one of them to begin the search from the brow of the hill.

Down they went, and on they went, spreading and doubling in every direction; then hunting backward, until it seemed as though he must be discovered. Led on by the old squaw, who seemed to hold a high place among them, the women came to the edge of the plateau, many of them squatting within a few feet of him, and set up a wailing, intermingled with howls of derision, which was enough to make the stoutest heart quail.

When it became apparent that they would not have Mire to end up their sports, they devised other plans, and completed their allotted time, ending up with such engorgement of food and such potations of fire water that most of them lay, as usual after such times, in a state of almost death-like stupor.

It was, however, impossible for Mire to move from his hiding place for several days, but as he lay there the first night the song of the old woman kept sounding and taking form in his brain, and words which seemed to have no meaning now took such hold on his mind that he found himself instinctively making cautious search with his fingers among the leaves and litter beneath the log; every stick, every bunch of moss, was thus felt over. What was that? An ear of corn surely, and another, and another, wrapped and buried in the moss. Hardly daring to breathe, he still felt the need of preserving his strength, and in this strange way corn, mingled with moss and leaves, made a good supper.

The old woman came daily with her companions and perched upon the log, so moving and stirring the contents of the hollow that it was possible for him to change his position beneath her without being noticed. A heavy rain packed it more closely and rendered the chance of detection less; a large chunk which had seemed to him to be a stone covered and incrustured with moss, and which he had used for a pillow, he began to fancy emitted a savory fragrance, and it proved to be a flitch of dried venison. He was comparatively sheltered from the rain, but having been stripped of his clothing for the gauntlet race, he suffered many twinges of cold and pain.

He realized that the strange old squaw was giving him "points" in her conversation with the other women, and he spent his time in putting them together and forming his line of action.

One day she sang a song. It ran this way: "When the young eagles stretch out their wings for flight they circle and circle and choose their

course; some fly to the east, some to the west, and some to the southland. Facing the sun they fly, watching the water courses, until they come to where they empty into a great river, and they fly down, down, ever to the south, until they come to the land of the white man, but his houses and his tall spires frighten them away. The white man dwells in the southland, and the streams and the water courses tell the way to find him, and the warm winds beckon, but the white man is our enemy and our eagles go not there, save to rend and tear him in pieces. When the moon gets high then the eagles can fly by night and hunt for the water courses and the southland and learn where the enemy dwells."

So sang the old squaw, this and much more, and Mire learned that it would be safe for him to start as soon as the moon was full, and take his way, by the guidance of the sun and the water courses.

One night she sang much of a little lake which he had often visited with her for fishing purposes, and the song was full of the cries of the loon. To that lake he must make his way and call her with such cries. She made him clearly understand that.

The braves had gone again on one of their marches, and only one or two suspicious ones remained with the women and children; these were lulled to sleep with firewater, made more potent because served to them by the old squaw, and Mire made his start.

The lake was reached and his cry of the loon soon brought her; a birch canoe was brought from a hiding place and found to be stocked with venison and other things which would keep him from hunger for some time.

Means of securing them about him under his blanket were found; a bow and arrows, a tomahawk, moccasins, and other comforts added, and instructions given to paddle down the length of the lake, which ran in a southerly direction, sink his boat, and follow certain indications until he reached the hut of a trader of whom she knew, who would be friendly and of service to further him on his way.

The result was that after many weary days and much suffering—the beginning of a terrible rheumatism, resulting from his long stay under the log and from which he was never again free—he reached the borders of civilization, and finally the old home, where he found his parents and most of his family still living, having also had remarkable escapes and trials.

His appearance was greeted with joy and wonder, for they had long mourned him as dead. When he had thrown off his savage attire and been clothed like unto other men; when hair and the young beard which had begun to grow in his absence had been properly curtailed and trained, a noticeable thing was observed. Just above the forehead there was a strange line of hair, white as snow, running diagonally, and bearing the semblance to a gash from a tomahawk blade, except for its color.

Is it too great a stretch of imagination to think that the memory of that weapon, as it played its varied parts in his torture on that dreadful morning, had to do with this disfigurement?

THE GOLD DELUGE.*

Astounding consequences arising from the discovery of a chemist—Terror of the governments to whom unlimited gold meant destruction—The extraordinary lengths to which Erik Poulsen was driven to maintain his independence.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

ERIK POULSEN, a Danish chemist, after several years of experimenting, succeeds in discovering how to make gold. He is anxious to publish the formula to the world, but his government will not hear to it, declaring that it will overturn civilization. So he and his wife depart for Berlin, and here he is offered the crown of a small kingdom in exchange for his secret, to be the property of Germany. But he indignantly declines and leaves for Paris, where he proposes to lay the facts before the editor of a widely circulated journal of chemistry and reap the fame that is his due, even if he should thereby be bereft of the fortune his discovery has brought him. But on the very doorstep he is accosted by an official of the French government, who requests him to report at once to the chief of police.

CHAPTER VII.—WITH THE PRESIDENT OF FRANCE.

"BY what right am I asked to report to the police?" asked Erik, retreating a step.

"In the name of the law!" replied the stranger, and immediately exposed a tricolored sash over his breast, which had been hidden by his top-coat.

Erik was silenced. He saw he was mistaken in the belief that he was in a free country and could walk around as a free man. Without any further resistance he followed the officer.

The chief of the Paris police met Erik with the greatest courtesy and politeness. He acted, he explained, only under orders from the highest authorities, and was to conduct Erik immediately before the president of the republic. In a moment his carriage would be at the door, to take them to the Elysée.

The president received Erik in his library, and by a look indicated to the chief of police that his presence was no longer needed.

"You were very unwise, monsieur, in attempting to see Professor Bucis," he began. "I can imagine that you did so with the purpose of arranging with him for the publication of your discovery in his journal."

Erik could not deny this.

"I knew it very well. Do you not understand, however, that such a proceeding could not be tolerated? Do you not recollect what the Danish minister told you? You need not be surprised that I am as well informed about that conversation as though I had been present myself. I will tell you

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frankly how it happened. The Danish ministry of foreign relations sent a confidential notice of your discovery and the conversation they had with you, to all governments, so that foreign nations were guarded against, and could protect themselves from this universal danger. All the governments have agreed that this wonderful discovery carries with it the very gravest dangers for everything that is understood by the term: civilization and normal, regular business conditions. It cannot and must not be published, and the various governments have all made the most solemn assurances that each would keep its eyes open and, if required, take the most strenuous measures to prevent your discovery reaching public knowledge. Believe me, you would do best by observing what I tell you. Your personal freedom will not be hindered in the least, and if you carefully consider everything you must admit that you would yourself derive the greatest benefit by *secrecy, not publicity*. No living person thinks of preventing you from making as much gold as you please and using the same in any manner you choose. What is there in the world you need deny yourself? The incomes of all countries are limited to the amount of taxation the people are able to bear, while yours is limited only by your will. And you certainly know," the president continued, smilingly, "gold will buy anything. But, on the other hand, I must agree with you, that it would be a great wrong if such a discovery remained the property of a single person only, to die with him. It should be the property of a state; then the most wonderful amount of good could be done in the services of civilization. Now, without intending to be too selfish, I am of the opinion that the secret could not be given into better care than that of the French republic."

Erik started.

"Or, if you deem it best to have the matter remain a secret with you, you could place a certain quantity of gold at the disposal of our government. France would know well how to appreciate it and show its gratitude in many different ways."

"Mr. President," Erik replied, "I have already been offered a crown!"

"Ah," replied the president, perfectly calm, "you come from Berlin? And you declined the crown?"

"Yes, I did."

"That was very honorable on your part; but be warned once more, for your own sake, most urgently against being careless. You have been warned once in Copenhagen—do you remember?—when you attempted to have a description of your discovery printed, and now you are making a second attempt in the same direction. Any other government but that of France would have taken the most severe measures against you at the repetition of such an offense."

"I have heard that once before, but I cannot understand what steps you can take against me," Erik answered. "It certainly is not a crime which I have committed, and as long as I do not conflict with your laws, nothing could be done to me except to expel me from the country."

"Oh, certainly, monsieur, there are other measures that can be taken; for instance—"

He whispered something in Erik's ear, causing him to start and turn pale.

"Of course the government would only adopt such measures in the very greatest emergency," the president continued, "but if there are no other means left——" He looked at Erik with a very serious expression in his eyes, then added: "Meantime I will assume that you were not aware of the facts I have just told you, and that you will realize how futile and hopeless is your plan to make public your discovery. Should the moment ever arrive when you desire to sell your discovery, come to France. No other government will do as much for you. But I certainly do hope you will never again think of publishing the facts. The safety of the people is the highest law."

The president shrugged his shoulders and made his farewell bow to Erik.

CHAPTER VIII.—ON THE SPANISH ISLAND.

BETWEEN Alicante and Cabo de la Nao, in southeastern Spain, and a few miles from the coast, lies a small rocky island. It is called *Isla Verde*, and is beautifully located.

The island was a very secluded and lonesome one. The Spanish coast opposite is very rocky and bare of all habitations or vegetation, and only at a very great distance can ships plying between Alicante, Valencia, and ports more northerly, be distinguished.

Erik purchased this island from the Spanish government, which did not fail to get an excessive price therefor. On an elevated section, he had a magnificent villa erected, of solid blocks of polished white marble, and the small inlet on the southwest side of the island was converted into a very pretty little harbor in which a steam yacht was anchored, ready at any moment to carry its master wherever his desire dictated.

Erik and his wife had visited many foreign countries since that memorable conversation with the president of the French republic. Weary of it all, and mostly of his fellow men, he finally resolved to settle on this solitary island and resume his work.

On the ground floor of the villa he had a chemical laboratory, as complete and profuse in paraphernalia as it was possible by lavish expenditure to make it. With the charm of newness gone, however, all this lost its attraction for him. He endeavored to be systematical in his experimental work in the laboratory, and once having mentally reasoned out and spent much time thinking over the natural process of diamond formation, he began the study of their artificial production. He was not rewarded with much success, however, never producing more than microscopical diamonds.

He became discontented with life in general and himself especially and spent days in walking about restlessly doing nothing. His desk was burdened with scientific journals and papers, but he never interested himself in them. Thus time passed slowly.

Worst of all, the relations between Erik and his wife were becoming slightly strained. For the very reason that there was nothing of a purely material character that they could not wish for and immediately procure,

their very existence seemed to become doleful and inanimate. They no longer had occasion to wish for a small cottage with a little garden surrounding it, or a horse and wagon; the open sesame for all that and much more was in their possession, and yet ennui and lonesomeness beset them. Yet neither ever openly admitted it or broached the subject, and often they both thought with deep emotion and sadness of the happy days in the factory at Roenninhof, where they were happy and contented, notwithstanding their limited means.

Both suffered silently from the fact that his name should so long be unknown, whereas they both well knew that it ought to be on the lips of every one. Generally he was taken for an eccentric Englishman. During his residence in Montpelier he attempted to form connections with the local scientific circles, and succeeded in becoming a member of the Physico Mathematical Society, but he realized that his wealth alone had secured the honor for him, and that in reality he was considered a nonentity.

In this society he became acquainted with a professor from Paris who had achieved fame by discovering a new dynamic electric machine, but Erik soon felt that this gentleman looked down upon him as a wealthy amateur, whose personality in a scientific respect represented very little. Erik longed to see all these people at his feet in breathless astonishment.

The more he pondered over this, the more he fretted that he could not obtain his heart's wish. What was it to him that secretly gold was his obedient servant, and that there was nothing in the world he could not possess by simply pointing his finger at it? One thing he pined for more than all else—celebrity, undying fame—and that very dearest wish of his whole life was denied him. Hopelessly he writhed in mental agony in the effort to find some means of bringing his discovery out into the world beyond the reach of his invisible captors. Would it be a good plan to write up the history of the process, seal it in a bottle and cast it into the sea? Should he ascend in a balloon and distribute it over the world? Ah, well, all that was nonsense; these means would never bring the news into the hands of the scientists; some government would surely rob him of the valuable secret. No, think as he could, no solution came to the enigma. If it was ever to be solved, accident would be the main factor.

The inactivity of their life on the island, where hours crawled over the face of the clock like snails, was unbearable now. He could no longer endure the narrow confines of his small domain, so he decided to start on a trip around the world in his yacht.

During the six months that this vessel lay at its moorings off the city of Glasgow, its fame spread over the entire civilized world. This, in spite of the greatest efforts at secrecy. The owner, "a strange fellow, who evidently became the possessor of a vast fortune in the East Indies or China," wished it so, so the people were told. However, as more than a thousand workmen were busy on the ship every day, it was not surprising that the most prominent papers, headed by the *London Times*, published articles similar to the following:

A peculiar vessel has been in course of construction for some time in the Glasgow

shipyard. It is built from platinized steel plates and fitted out with a lavish comfort and luxuriance hitherto unknown. Although, as report has it, the vessel is intended merely for pleasure, it is to be supplied with several cannon of comparatively heavy caliber, and is, in many respects, equipped like a man of war. Twelve roomy cabins, gorgeous with genuine gold leaf adornments on the ceilings and solid ebony woodwork, reach from the afterdeck to amidship and form a marine abode of the grandest splendor and greatest comfort. According to rumors, the owner is a more than eccentric foreigner, for whom, being the owner of immense gold fields in another part of the world, a few hundred thousand pounds more or less are of no moment. The cost of construction of this wonderful pleasure ship is estimated at more than one and a half millions pounds sterling, exclusive of the intrinsic value of the steam boilers, which are made from rolled platinum.

The ship was christened "*Chemeia*" (the Greek word for chemistry) and was launched at the commencement of the new century. The trial trip gave the greatest satisfaction, although it took place under the most unfavorable meteorological conditions. The *Chemeia*, in the opinion of experts, was one of the finest ships that ever left port.

Late in January she steamed out of Glasgow toward the Atlantic; at the same time an English corvette, which had been hovering in the vicinity, set her course in a like direction, so that both vessels always were in sight of each other. Towards the southwest coast of Ireland they met a fast sailing French man of war, which also followed in the chase, after having for some time exchanged signals with the Englishman.

CHAPTER IX.—THE WORM TURNS.

SLOWLY sailing along, under only one half its steaming capacity, we find the *Chemeia* one year later between about seventy degrees west longitude and thirty two degrees south latitude, nearly three hundred miles west of the coast of Chili. The thermometer showed eighty degrees Fahrenheit in the shade.

Erik's wife sat at her desk writing while he sat next to her reading. Far off on the horizon the thick black smoke from the English corvette was sharply marked against the azure sky. The master of the vessel and his wife both showed a peculiarly jaded and hopeless expression on their countenances, and seldom was there a ghost of a smile on their lips. Sleepless nights, full of brain racking and serious thoughts, had left their indelible traces.

"What are you reading?" Erik's wife asked him in a sad voice, raising her head.

"Oh, it is a treatise by a German socialist," he replied, and passed his hand over his brow; "a pamphlet entitled '*The Golden Calf*.' By the way, it pictures our inmost thoughts. Listen to this passage, for instance:

"And now gold has become a universal curse under which the nations writhe in agony. It robs the poor of their bread and fills the cups of the wealthy and affluent with excessive riches. It robs humanity of its natural sleep and rest, because he who has no gold thinks unremittingly of how he can gain it, and he who has some in his possession has no peace of mind waking or sleeping, fearing that conspirators are nigh to rob him of his store.

The instinct of avarice is absorbed with the mother's milk ; developed from generation to generation, and so strongly fixed that all other nobler feelings and thoughts are crowded into the background by the one greedy desire—to possess. Year after year, day after day, and with each new human being entering the world, this fire of avarice burns on and increases in intensity and will never be quenched until gold—all gold—this cursed, fatal gold is driven from the throne it now occupies, and dragged in the dust."

Erik dropped the pamphlet.

"Do you not think, my dear, that this is an exact expression of what you and I also feel?"

"And where or how shall we find the means of ending all this unbearable misery?" she asked anxiously.

"Naturally in socialism. And who is it that asserts its advocates are not right."

"But until that time comes? It surely will not be for years and years."

"Yes, but listen again. 'But where shall we find the man who can strike the first blow? He who will be courageous enough to arise and openly declare: 'This then is the last day of gold's power.' Who shall announce to kings and all governments (the miserable slaves of the yellow metal) that the hour of the *sublimest of all revolutions* has come?'"

The wife rose, went to her husband and laid both arms on his shoulders. Something akin to inspiration flamed in her eyes.

"He *will* appear," she said with quivering voice. "Erik, he *will* come—for you are the deliverer whom the world awaits!"

He stared before him vacantly, a bitter smile on his lips.

"Yes, but a miserable deliverer, bound and restricted on all sides—a moral captive; not even master over his own actions. Probably I will never become great in the world; never attain my highest object."

"Erik!" she exclaimed, and it seemed her voice rang clearer than it had for a long time, "we must not despair. Things cannot remain as they are much longer. We must rise in our might and realize that we have a mission in the world and that we are under great responsibilities—if not to others, then at least to ourselves. There must be some means of overcoming the difficulties in our way. Life under present conditions is unbearable—at least for you. I can plainly see how you suffer from this enforced idleness—it means mental death. Be a man, Erik, gather your energies, throw off by main effort this terrible incubus that crushes you. Remember, Erik, you were born to be a great man!"

"But tell me, what can I do? I see no remedy, no outlet; in whatever direction I turn, the way is barred; I cannot move a finger. Look there"—he pointed to the horizon, where lay the corvette—"what do you wish me, a miserable, unhappy prisoner, to do?"

"Erik," she replied hastily, "you are wrong; a man is never a prisoner so long as he has will power. We have both been discouraged and intimidated before ever attempting to give battle. What good result can there come from our sitting here and brooding? Our cause must become paramount to all else and everything must be risked to win. Are we not on board of

our own ship? Can we not escape from these myrmidons of vindictive powers? Erik, I say once more, be a man! When night falls, extinguish all the lights and flee from them in the darkness."

"Where to?"

"Anywhere, only—away!—to a strange, uncivilized country if you wish."

"And then?"

"No man asks such a question," she replied firmly and looked into his eyes; "at least such a great man. Do *you* wish to have future generations say of you, that you only accidentally made a discovery, but had not the courage to bear the consequences? Erik," she whispered, "do you wish the world to think you were a *coward*?"

A scarlet color flushed his face and he turned it away from her. His hands were clenched convulsively and his neck seemed straining under an enormous weight. A few moments passed in silence; neither moved nor spoke. At last he faced her suddenly.

"You mean to ask me whether I am a man or—a *coward*?" He spoke harshly.

His wife looked up alarmed. She did not know that face. Had she vexed him? Was that the same mild, yielding husband who had never spoken one cross word during all their married life? She became frightened at the sudden change and stepped back with a cry of alarm, as he raised his hand as though to strike her.

"Erik!" she half screamed, but he apparently neither heard nor saw her. The hand he had raised fell heavily upon the ebony board so that it shook and nearly split in two.

"We shall see," he said hoarsely to himself and left the cabin, closing the door with great violence. His wife sank to a chair, breathless with excitement, her heart beating furiously.

CHAPTER X.—ALL READY FOR ACTION.

"CAPTAIN, call the crew together," Erik commanded, stepping on deck.

Captain Alsloev looked up in astonishment. What had come over the usually quiet owner, who never cared for anything except to sail continuously, irresolutely, no matter where, while he sat in his cabin, dreaming over a cigar or a book?

The captain and crew had at first marveled at this continuous sailing about with no object, then they found it ridiculous, and finally, during the course of the last year, had become accustomed to it as well as the two men of war, which were constantly on their heels. At first the appearance of these vessels also was a subject of lively comment and conjecture among them, but now they rarely gave them any notice. Their solution of the riddle was that the owner of their vessel was one of the richest and most eccentric individuals of the world, and one deserving of the greatest pity, suffering from an incurable "spleen," knowing nothing better to kill time than crossing and recrossing the seas. With this conviction, and the recollection that they were always promptly paid, they rested content. As a rule, they could do as they wished,

as the owner cared for and interested himself in nothing that concerned the ship. There were some of the crew who believed Erik to be addicted to the morphine or opium habit, with no other purpose in the world than to idle away time in his cabin under the influence of his drugs, dreaming dreams of voluptuous fancy.

It was for this reason that Captain Alsloev was so astounded to hear himself addressed in such a commanding and determined tone of voice. He manifested no visible signs of his surprise, however, and gave orders to the second mate to pipe the crew to quarters, while he turned to Erik and exchanged a few words with him regarding the fine weather and their pleasant trip. Erik heard him not.

Gradually the crew assembled on deck, not a little surprised and wondering what it was the owner had to tell them. When all were on deck Erik sent for his wife.

He was apparently very nervous. Up and down he walked, with short and nervous steps, stopping at times, first looking out over the sea and then gazing up to the clear blue sky.

"The crew is assembled, sir," the captain reported.

Erik stood still and fought a moment to control himself. He began to speak in a voice which he tried hard to keep steady. "I know well that all of you have wondered as to what kind of a man it was who engaged your services, and you were necessarily obliged to rest content with the belief that he is a wealthy, eccentric fellow, with no other object in life than to cross the ocean to kill time. I consider the moment as having come when I must tell you who I am and what I am, and first of all I must tell you that you serve a man knowing *no rest or peace*."

A murmur went through the assembled crew.

"The most of you," Erik continued, "come from indigent parents; you all know what it means to work from earliest childhood for your daily bread. Not one of you will deny that *gold governs* the world. You know that the entire civilization and the governments of all countries are based on and governed by gold. If then, all at once, this gold could be removed from the world, those who today are powerful would be weak. Therefore there is not one government in the wide world which would not, by fair means or foul, use all preventives against such an occurrence."

The men composing the crew looked at one another, evidently undecided as to what they should think. What was the owner of the ship driving at?

"Look yonder at the two men of war," Erik continued, and his voice gradually became stronger and firmer. "Can you surmise why they so persistently pursue us and guard our every movement? That is done because we sail about here, with the most *dangerous of secrets* on board, and they are ordered to prevent at *any cost* this secret becoming known to the world. We are cut off from all communication with civilization. When we make any port they do likewise and their spies and police watch each step we take. Do you, men, know what this great secret is?"

Every man present gazed at Erik in speechless astonishment.

"I have made a great discovery. I can convert a base metal, or elementary matter, into *gold*, and the moment this, my discovery, becomes known to the world at large, *all gold now in existence will instantaneously lose its value!*"

The amazement and wonder of the crew were indescribable. Speechless, all stared at Erik for fully a minute; it seemed that they had not understood what he said; then from all sides came these exclamations: "He is a gold maker!" "Oh, nonsense!" "That is all nonsense!" "Who'd ever have thought it?" "Keep quiet!" "He must be crazy!" "But if he tells you so?" "Well, well, that is the queerest thing I ever heard."

Erik let them talk all they liked, while he stood silently by.

"You do not believe me?" he asked, when silence had been restored.

"The devil take us if we believe you, your honor," replied a thick, groggy voice.

"I assure you on my word of honor that I speak the truth, and am prepared at any time to give you indubitable evidence," Erik went on.

"Do you hear?" "Bravo!" were the cries.

"Do you believe me now?"

"Yes, yes." "Yes, we do believe you." "There is not one of us here who doubts you." "But why in the mischief do you not keep that for yourself?" The thick voice again spoke.

"I will tell you," Erik continued; "because the renown and celebrity to which I am entitled by my discovery is worth a million times more than *all* this dead wealth. I was offered a king's crown for my discovery, but I have refused it."

Mute astonishment!

One old sailor clasped his hands and mumbled: "A king's crown!"

"Because you are yourself a king," came in soft, tender accents from the lips of Erik's wife. She had stepped to his side and several of the sailors unconsciously uncovered their heads.

"And now, my friends," Erik again resumed, "you must know why I had you piped together and why I told you all this. It is my firm resolve to risk *everything*, defy *all* these powers, and attempt, even by the *most desperate* means, to make public my discovery. It is my intention to extinguish all lights this night, to put the engines to their utmost limits, make every pound of steam the boiler will hold and—*escape from our pursuers*. For the present, we will direct the ship's course towards the South Pole, to reach secluded regions and breathe freely once more. After that is attained the next step will be considered. First, however, I must know whether all of you are ready to remain with me under these altered conditions. Each one shall be guided by his own wishes; those not caring to remain shall be sent ashore. I cannot foretell the results of my coming actions. We may be sent to the bottom of the sea or all of us be captured and imprisoned—who can tell? The governments will naturally exert the most determined and desperate efforts to protect themselves against the danger I threaten them with. That you have nothing to lose, if money should lose its value, I well know, but you can all become famous if you assist me in making known to the world

the greatest discovery ever made. Consider; hold counsel among yourselves; decide as to whether you will or will not share my lot. In one hour I shall expect your answer. And you, captain?" Erik added, turning to Alsloev.

"I should be a coward," he replied, "if I did not promptly say that I will remain with you under *all* circumstances!"

The sailors adjourned to the large cabins below and, stretched out on tables, in hammocks and on benches, they debated the question. It is needless to give all that was said; suffice it, that after various arguments pro and con, Kelly and Szemsky were appointed a committee to tell the owner that they would accept the offer, in consideration of each one having a share in the ship allotted to him. The officers had also held a meeting in the captain's room and decided to await the sailors' decision.

Erik received the two seamen in his cabin and with a half smile heard their proposition. All was agreed upon and the matter thus settled.

CHAPTER XI.—FLIGHT AND PURSUIT.

THE sun sank in the west and twilight was followed by semi darkness. The good ship Chemeia slowly pursued her way on a westerly course.

A single sail could be distinguished through the evening mists, already rising from the sea and, looking towards the east and southeast, could be seen the two men of war, which were just at that moment hauling up their lanterns to the mast heads.

Erik and the captain stood on the commander's bridge. The first mate was with them. But few words were exchanged. Their faces showed serious thought and anxiety. Erik's hand was gripped tightly around the bridge railing, while he stared steadily at the two war vessels. They were both gliding along as slowly as the Chemeia.

"Very soon now it will be pitch dark," said the captain, "and it would be well to haul up our lanterns."

"I will leave that to you," said Erik.

The captain gave orders to the man on watch, and very soon the lanterns were strung up.

"Defense is increasing her speed," the captain remarked; "they will probably keep a sharp eye on us."

Surely enough, the French man of war came along at a higher rate of speed than before, passed the Chemeia about a quarter of a mile away, and again decreased her speed.

"When does the moon rise?" Erik asked, frowning.

"Towards morning," replied the captain; "and by then we will be far beyond their vision."

"That we *must* be," Erik rejoined shortly.

The night became darker and the ocean changed gradually from a deep, bluish green color to an intense black; only the whitecaps cresting the waves could be distinguished.

It had been decided to wait to change the course until shortly before mid-

night when the watches aboard the men of war were relieved. All preparations were most carefully made. In the engineer's room the fires were fed until the boilers roared and a thick black smoke rose from the stacks. The largest part of the crew were resting in their berths, gathering strength for their arduous night's work.

Erik also descended to his cabin to try to rest, but he found it impossible. Each minute he sprang from the armchair in which he tried to compose himself to sleep and paced the floor restlessly. Though she felt her nerves to be as tensely strung as her husband's, Erik's wife nevertheless made efforts to quiet him, but without avail.

Five long, weary, dragging hours slowly crept by. Each minute they looked at the cabin clock.

At last! The clock struck one quarter to twelve! Every one on deck! Quick!

The crew, every man of them, were gathered silent and alert. The captain stood on the commander's bridge, watch in hand. Erik and his wife ascended the stairs and stood beside him.

"Now!"

Capt. Alsloev replaced his watch in his pocket.

"Down the lights!" he called in subdued excitement, at the same moment pressing the electric button.

Instantly the Chemeia's lights sank to the deck and were extinguished like meteors. Everything was dark except the compass, and on that alone a small electric lamp cast its subdued glimmer. The captain called an order down into the engine room.

"Full steam ahead!"

The helmsman let go the wheel, which ran back until the rudder chain slackened and the Chemeia took the south-by-east course.

A moment of intense suspense followed, while all eyes were riveted in the direction where lay the French man of war Defense.

"They are snoring, the sleepy heads," Kelly, the boatswain, called out. "There, now you have it, Petterson."

No one replied.

"Where's Petterson?" the boatswain asked. No one had seen the fireman.

"Where the mischief is Petterson?" Kelly again cried aloud, his face turning to a purple red.

"*The small boat is gone!*" Szemsky, another of the firemen, made answer.

Again the captain shouted an order down into the engine room, whereupon Jackson's voice was heard replying something.

"No matter," the captain rejoined; "as much power as the engines can give."

Kelly had no time to reply. From the east came a sudden, bright flash, and a few seconds later a sharp report and a dull roar rolled over the sea. Simultaneously a flash and report came from the other side.

Again the captain shouted down into the engine room. A reply came back in Jackson's voice.

"No matter," said the captain; "force the engines to their utmost!"

In breathless suspense every one looked over the sea, but no other shots were heard.

"We will set the water a-boiling for them, the dogs," Kelly muttered; he gave vent to a cry of alarm at the same instant. A strong, blinding flash of light broke forth from a point far distant, illuminated the sea for half a mile about and, with lightning rapidity, ran around the entire horizon until it rested, after a few seconds, on the Chemeia, illuminating the entire ship so brilliantly that the men on board could plainly see one another's features.

"That devil's ship has an electric searchlight!" Kelly yelled.

"There! The Englishman is also following suit," Captain Alsloev said excitedly, and pointed in the direction opposite, where, at the same moment, a similar brilliant light shot forth and also became fixed on the Chemeia. A new shot was heard, although the flash of light could hardly be distinguished in the blinding glare of the searchlights.

"Good heavens! That came very near hitting us," the captain exclaimed, and called another order down into the engine room.

"Seven lines above the red," Jackson replied.

"That will not do!—go on—more!" was the command. The English ship seemed coming nearer and nearer, and yet the Chemeia shot through the water with such frightful speed that she trembled and quaked from the masts to her keel. The safety valves gave forth ominously hissing sounds.

Erik stood, pale and silent, upon the bridge, his wife by his side. With compressed lips he steadily watched the ball of fire, the smaller end of which seemed to be approaching nearer and nearer.

"We must escape from them at any price. How are the engines working?" he asked the captain.

"The manometer cannot register any higher degree of steam pressure, and the steam is escaping in volumes through the safety valves," the captain replied.

A moment more he stared in desperate, thoughtful silence at the English ship, then leaned over the speaking tube, pressed the electric call button and thundered down: "Throw in more coal! Get up more steam! Lay weights on the safety valves!"

"The boilers cannot stand the strain; they are near bursting now!" the answer came from below.

"*They must!*"

The hissing sounds from the valves ceased, and fresh, black columns of smoke surged forth from the stacks. A rough, short jerk shook the ship, and immediately thereafter it shot on, still faster through the seething waters, and the sea behind it boiled and frothed and roared like a waterfall.

"Hurrah!" the crew yelled as one man. "We are escaping!"

The Defense seemed actually to be losing ground.

"Aha," Kelly said gleefully, "a ship like this——"

"They are firing again," the first mate interrupted him.

A report, much louder than the first, rolled over the waves, but there was no telling where the missile had struck.

Like an arrow the Chemeia sped through the water. The Defense was far in the rear; her electric searchlight glimmered but faintly on the horizon a while yet and then disappeared entirely. Only the English ship Madras seemed to be evenly matched with the Chemeia, and even that fast vessel was being gradually left behind.

The Madras kept up a continuous fire from her cannon on the forward deck, but the people on the Chemeia felt themselves secure in the hope that the distance was too great for any balls to strike them. Unfortunately this was a grave error. When all expected it the least, a monstrous missile came whizzing through the air and tore away the two upper spars from both masts of the Chemeia, causing splinters of wood and countless fragments of shattered iron to rain all over the deck.

The captain turned pale. He whispered quietly to Erik: "We cannot stand this much longer; their aim is too good."

Erik did not vouchsafe any reply. He bit his lip angrily and a deep frown laid his forehead in folds. A new projectile shot past and fell into the sea on the lee side of the Chemeia, and plainly could its hissing be heard as the water extinguished its dangerous life. Matters were becoming more and more uncomfortable for all on board.

Erik suddenly started as though struck; a new idea had come to him most unexpectedly. He leaned over the railing and called among the crew: "Can any one of you men train a cannon?"

"Yes!" a number of hoarse voices chorused. "Szemsky can do it; he was chief officer of ordnance on board a Russian man of war."

Szemsky stepped up and placed his hand to his cap in salute.

"I believe that I can well train a cannon, sir," he said.

"Then come up here at once!" Erik went on hastily. "In danger we learn to know our friends." Then, as Szemsky approached, he added: "Do you care to risk your life to save the Chemeia?"

"Yes, sir; if it is necessary," Szemsky replied, looking Erik straight in the eye.

"Good," said the chemist, grasping the sailor's hand; "we have no time to lose. Get the large cannon in shape for firing."

"Aye, aye, sir," Szemsky replied, saluting in military style and going to his post.

Erik called several of the crew to him and ordered them to follow him into his laboratory, whence they returned a few minutes later, carrying a cask which they carefully deposited on deck.

"Open the cask; be careful!" Erik commanded; "go slow. It is gun cotton," he explained to Captain Alsloev, who this moment came down from the bridge; "with powder our cannon would not carry so far. Hurry there!" he continued, as a new charge was fired from the enemy and the ball flew by, close to their heads. "But be cautious. The slightest jar or friction will cause the greatest havoc and destroy us all! gently! A little more! So, all is well!"

"Now, my friend," Erik continued, turning to Szemsky and laying his hand on the seaman's shoulder, "train the gun directly at the searchlight.

There is nothing else for us to do; we must cannonade the lighting apparatus to smithereens!"

"But—at this distance——?" Szemsky mumbled irresolutely.

"Yes, yes," Erik made haste to say, "I know that it is like a ticket in a lottery and that we have one chance in ten thousand, but never mind—go on—we have no other choice! Let worse come to worse or——! The cannon, however, will probably explode."

"That it very likely will," Szemsky said, as though that were a matter of no moment. "But I am ready."

"Back there! Step to one side. Cover, men, cover; back to cover, as well as you can!"

"Szemsky, my friend," and Erik offered the Pole his hand.

"I will do what I can," Szemsky said modestly, warmly grasping the hand; "and now you, sir, must also step aside," he concluded, and Erik hesitatingly retreated; it seemed to him as though it were against his will.

For a long time (it seemed ages) Szemsky trained the cannon. Breathless silence reigned; no one knew just what to expect next. All, however, had a mysterious foreboding that it was to be an extraordinary incident in their lives. To Erik the seconds seemed like hours.

Otto M. Moeller.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

CAPTURED BY SLAVES.

A story of the uprising of the down trodden and the peculiar nature of their vengeance—Despair in the hour of hope and a new peril which leads to an unlooked for denouement.

ONE of the strangest stories that I think I ever heard was related to me by a young Portuguese officer who had recently returned from a five years' term of service on the head waters of the Zambesi River in Southern Africa.

Our conversation had drifted into a discussion of the sagacity of animals, and after a short silence Lieutenant Marques said slowly: "It fell to my lot, gentlemen, during my African experience, to witness a most remarkable incident that bears directly upon the question you have been discussing.

"Two years ago I was in command of a small station located far up on the Zambesi River. With two companions, Gomes and Travarres, I was guarding a convoy of government slaves, expecting every day to be ordered down to the coast with them. The head keeper of the slave prison was a burly Arab, named Mokka, a man in whom we placed the utmost confidence; to this day I have never been certain whether that confidence was misplaced or not; and, as you will readily perceive from what follows, it was a matter that I never cared to probe very deeply.

"Gomes and I were sitting one evening outside our quarters, smoking and chatting, and Travarres was sleeping in the doorway. Suddenly a loud outcry came from the direction of the slave prison. We sprang to our feet in

amazement, and stood for a moment listening, instead of laying hold of our arms.

"That delay was fatal, for of a sudden a swarm of natives, armed with clubs and spears, rushed on us from all sides. Unarmed as we were, resistance was useless, and in a short time we were overpowered, and bound securely hand and foot.

"My first impression was that the natives of the village had revolted, but to my surprise I now discovered that our captors were the liberated slaves. Some of them still wore the iron shackles on their arms and ankles. How they had broken their bonds and escaped from the prison was a mystery.

"There was no reason to suspect the villagers, for these slaves belonged to a distant tribe that had in former years warred against the people of this very village. The Arab Mokka I felt convinced was the guilty man, but my suspicions were speedily shattered, for half a dozen more slaves now came up, and with them was Mokka, bound like ourselves.

"The events of that night can never be erased from my mind. Our quarters were speedily searched, and, armed with the plundered rifles, the infuriated slaves made a raid on the village, slaughtering all whom they met, men, women and children. In the mean while they left us under a group of palm trees in the custody of a strong guard.

"This riotous conduct lasted until nearly daylight, and then, after first setting on fire the village, the liberated slaves started away in a northerly direction toward their own land, and to our horror forced us to accompany them. Their reasons for taking this step were very plain; they dared not kill us, and they were afraid to leave us behind, lest we should organize a pursuing party, and recapture them before they had made good their escape.

"Deprived of food and water, we were hurried along all that day through the burning sun. A brief halt was made at night, and then the march was resumed in the darkness, and kept up until evening of the following day.

"That night we camped by a water course, and with food and a long rest we found fresh strength to continue the journey, for our inexorable captors still showed no intention of releasing us.

"For two days longer we marched, weary and footsore, into the interior, and at last, on the evening of the fourth day, our bonds were cut, rifles were put into our hands, and leaving us to our own devices, our captors plunged into the jungle and disappeared.

"In our joy at being liberated we forgot everything else, until the coming darkness warned us that some place of security must be found to spend the night. It was a very gloomy and serious situation, for we were now in a most desolate and savage part of Africa, many miles from the nearest friendly village, and whether we would ever reach the Zambesi again was really doubtful.

"Mokka, meanwhile, had been closely scrutinizing the surroundings, and his dark face lit up with joy.

" 'Me know this country,' he cried. 'Me hunt slaves here many time. Come, me know where water is.' /

"This was pleasing news indeed, and while we followed after him in sin-

gle file through the jungle, Mokka explained that many years before he had been employed by an Arab chief, who raided many villages in this part of the country.

"The Arab's story was soon verified, for in less than ten minutes he brought us to the edge of a swampy pool of water, that glittered blood red in the dying rays of the sun.

"We had barely satisfied our thirst, when a discovery was made that destroyed our last hope. We had rifles indeed, but no ammunition.

"'We are lost!' cried Gomes; 'we shall die of starvation here in the desert.'

"Even Mokka, ever fertile of expedient, could offer no consolation. Sick at heart, we flung ourselves on the ground. The Arab, more thoughtful, first made a huge fire to keep off wild beasts during the night.

"I must have fallen asleep finally, for I remember that I was dreaming of certain incidents that had befallen me far away in Lisbon years before, when a rude awakening came, and Mokka dragged me to my feet.

"'Look, señor, look!' he exclaimed in a husky voice.

"The fire still burnt brightly, and, following Mokka's outstretched arm, I saw plunging to and fro through the swamp a vast drove of elephants. The crashing of trees and undergrowth was tremendous, yet my two companions slept on calmly.

"At intervals loud trumpetings were heard, and at last they seemed to have completely surrounded us, for on all sides we could see the dark forms.

"We instinctively held on to our guns, though they were of no more use than blades of grass. Mokka was seriously alarmed, and not without good cause, as we presently discovered.

"Two or three of the great brutes suddenly advanced toward us. Once they stopped and trumpeted loudly, and then, elevating their trunks, they came on as though fully determined to trample us to death.

"I heard Mokka's teeth chattering as he stooped and took a burning brand from the fire.

"He threw it with good aim at the advancing brutes, and, after sniffing it suspiciously, they came to a dead halt, and then slowly moved off.

"But all the while the herd had been drawing closer and closer, and now they were huddled together in a circle, all around our camp fire.

"I believed that our last hour had come, and Mokka's dark face turned fairly pale. Gomes and Travarres still slept. I envied them as they lay peacefully on the ground, no doubt lost in pleasant dreams. It seemed a cruel thing to do, but they must be awakened, and I was just in the act of grasping Travarres' arm when a startled exclamation from Mokka absorbed my attention.

"The Arab was looking straight before him in rapt attention, and little wonder, for, standing on the very edge of the pool, not ten yards away, was the biggest elephant I ever saw in my life. He had approached quietly and noiselessly, and there he stood like a statue, his eyes fixed calmly upon us, his huge tusks of milk white ivory shining in the firelight, and his monstrous ears spread out like two mammoth fans.

" 'Hush, señor,' Mokka said in a whisper, and then, to my utmost surprise, he took two steps toward the elephant, and stopped. 'Jamba ! Jamba !' he said in a low voice, and then he gave a peculiar whistle.

"The scene that followed I can never forget. The elephant trumpeted, not with anger, but with joy, and as Mokka rushed up to him he wound his trunk about the Arab's waist and lifted him tenderly upon his broad back.

"At this point Gomes and Travarres awoke and witnessed the strange scene with the greatest astonishment. At a signal from Mokka, the elephant placed him carefully on the ground and advanced a pace or two nearer. The Arab was frantic with joy, and after many attempts he succeeded in explaining to us that this elephant, Jamba, had five years ago belonged to him when he was carrying on a trading business at Delagoa Bay. Misfortune had ruined his business and compelled him to part with his elephant, and he heard afterwards that the animal ran away and was never recaptured.

" 'And now, señors,' he added, 'we are saved. Jamba will take us out of this wilderness in a day and a night.'

"If Jamba was going to carry us to safety, there was no time to lose, for we were already faint from hunger. A pale light to the east showed that dawn was near at hand. The intelligent beast evidently understood all that Mokka had said, and one after another we were lifted upon the broad back.

"At a word from the Arab Jamba started briskly through the jungle at a sharp trot, and yet moving at such a steady gait that we had little difficulty in keeping our seats. For a mile or more the herd of elephants followed closely behind, but finally they halted in a body on the banks of a small stream and trumpeted in concert.

"To cut a long story short, that noble elephant bore us on his back for a whole day and a night, and at sunrise he halted on the brow of a hill overlooking a level expanse of country.

"Far across the plain we could see huts, and a flag flying from a pole.

"And now, to our surprise, the elephant refused to move a step farther. All Mokka's entreaties and commands were in vain.

" 'He no come,' said Mokka. 'He make us safe. He king elephant. Jamba go back.'

"The Arab was right. As soon as we were safely on the ground Jamba turned and made off through the bushes, and even Mokka's commands failed to check him for an instant.

"We made our way on foot to the huts, and as we drew near a Portuguese officer came on horseback to meet us, and we found that the village ahead was a Portuguese station, only two miles from our own place.

"A month later I was ordered down to the coast. Mokka remained on the Zambesi, and I never heard of him afterward. As for Jamba, I hope that he has escaped the predatory ivory hunters and will live to a good old age."

We had listened to Lieutenant Marques' story with the deepest interest, and at its conclusion we were unanimous in the opinion that it was the most remarkable tale of animal sagacity we had ever heard.

William Murray Graydon.

THE RIVER OF DARKNESS.*

A record of some marvelous experiences in the Dark Continent—Why a water journey beneath the earth's surface was undertaken at frightful risks—A voyage on a raft along an unknown course and without the possibility of retreat.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

GUY CHUTNEY, an officer in the British army, on his way back to service in India, is asked to stop off at Aden and take important despatches to Sir Arthur Ashby, governor of Zaila, on the African coast. En route the steamer touches at Berbera, where the great annual fair is being held. Here Chutney rescues from death Makar Makalo, by shooting a leopard whose slumbers the Arab had unwittingly disturbed, and a few minutes later he meets an old friend, Melton Forbes, foreign correspondent of an English newspaper. Suspecting that there is treachery in the wind, Forbes sends his native servant Momba through the town to investigate, who soon after returns pursued by a mob of Somali warriors. It appears that Manuel Torres, a Portuguese fellow passenger of Guy's on the Aden steamer, and whom he suspects of reading his despatches, has brought rifles to Makar Makalo, who is instituting rebellion against the English on behalf of Rao Khan, Emir of Harar.

Melton with his servant, accompanies Guy to Zaila, and at the residency they find Sir Arthur drinking champagne with Colonel Carrington. Their report carries consternation to the breast of the governor, who thinks of seeking safety on board the steamer. But it is too late; the Arabs are already swarming about the place, the Englishmen are all made prisoners, and doomed by Makar Makalo to be sent as slaves to the Somalis of the Galla country. During the journey the prisoners are separated through Makalo's agency, Guy and Melton being carried by the Arabs to Rao Khan. But the people of Harar, in their hatred of the English, demand that they be executed at once, and the Emir is forced to promise that they shall be sent to the block in four days' time. Meantime they are waited upon in their cell (Melton having been wounded) by Canaris, a Greek, who has been a favored captive of the Emir for two years. He shows them a document given him by an aged Englishman, who had died in the prison, and which tells of an underground river in the neighborhood which promises them all escape if they might only procure the money with which to make a few preparations. Guy has some in a belt which has been fortunately overlooked, and on an appointed night they overpower the guards and start for a deserted house, close by the city wall, where Canaris has had their provisions stored. But on the way Melton's wound breaks out afresh, and they are much delayed. They have nearly reached their destination, however, when Guy, turning his head, sees a Somali warrior following on their trail. The savage utters one long yell and then is shot down in his tracks by Canaris.

CHAPTER XIV.—OVER THE WALLS.

THE crack of the revolver, following closely on the Somali's loud yell, had barely died away in echoes when the dark street seemed fairly to burst into life.

The fugitives did not wait to see the result of the shot, but as they dashed madly forward they heard the people calling wildly to one another as they hurried out from their dwellings.

Even Melton kept up with wonderful endurance. The excitement had given him false strength, and he kept even pace with Guy and Canaris.

**This story began in the May issue of THE ARGOSY. The two back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 20 cents.*

Close at hand was the termination of the street, and as they were within ten yards of it a big Somali suddenly leaped out and barred the way.

The fugitives were going at a rate of speed which it was simply impossible to check. Canaris was a foot in advance, and in an instant more he would have impaled himself on the savage's out pointed spear.

It was too late to use the revolver which he still carried in his hand, but quick as a flash he hurled it with all his might, and with such correct aim that it landed plump on the fellow's head with an ugly crack.

The Somali howled with agony, letting the spear drop from his nerveless hands, and just as it clattered to the ground Canaris was upon him with a rush, and down they went together, the Somali undermost.

Canaris was up in a trice, and Guy and Melton, bounding on behind, trampled the half unconscious savage under their feet.

"Go on," said Guy fiercely. "We will outwit them yet. Brace up, Melton, we'll soon be out of this hole."

Forbes gritted his teeth to suppress a cry of pain.

"I can't keep up much longer," he said. "I'll faint from loss of blood."

The place they had just entered was the great trading locality and slave market of the town. At this time of year it was deserted, but the empty stalls and booths stood about in endless confusion.

The wisdom of the route chosen by Canaris was now apparent, for this labyrinth of paths, which wove an intricate network through the stalls, offered just the opportunity they wanted; and, following the Greek's guidance, they twisted in and out in a tortuous line that gradually brought them toward the opposite side of the market.

The outcry behind them had by this time swelled to a perfect tumult, and the night air bore it to their ears with startling distinctness.

Fortunately for the fugitives this vast court was surrounded by grim slave prisons, and they encountered no one in their flight. They reached the opposite side of the market in safety, and plunging in among the mass of empty prisons, ran on, panting and breathless.

The Greek's white burnous fluttered on ahead, turning angle after angle, diving into dark alleys and shooting across open spaces. At last he stopped, and, too exhausted to speak, waved his hand in triumph at the frowning wall of the town that towered directly over their heads for twenty feet.

Close by the wall was a circular stone tower, partly in ruins, and into this Canaris dived eagerly. It was an anxious moment to the two who waited on the outside, but at last the Greek reappeared in triumph with his hands full. The Jewish merchant had kept his promise.

He paused a second or two to listen to the outcry in the town.

"They are coming nearer," he said. "Keep cool and don't get excited. They will search every stall in the market before a man comes near us, and besides this is the last place they would look. They will never suspect us of any intention to scale the wall. Still we must lose no time," he added. "Now here is a box of shells apiece; put them in your pockets, buckle these sabers around your waists, take the rifles I bought. They are better, so you may throw the others away."

"Forbes can't carry one," said Guy. "What shall we do with it?"

"Leave it behind," replied Canaris. "We have burden enough. I had the Jew put up the stuff in three oilcloth bags. We must divide it into two loads."

He turned the contents of all on the ground.

"Yes, everything is here," he said; "crackers, dates, figs, two lamps, a box of candles, matches, and two flasks of palm oil. Now then for the final move."

He divided the stuff into two bags and then, going back into the guard tower, came out with a bunch of long ropes.

"Hurry up," said Guy. "Do you observe how close the sounds are coming?"

"They are searching the market," said Canaris calmly. "They take us for a party of drunken Arabs out on a lark."

"Then they don't suspect the truth?" asked Guy.

Canaris laughed.

"If it was known that the Emir's English prisoners had escaped," he said, "the fiends up yonder would be making more noise than the surf that breaks on the rocks at Bab el Mandeb."

The ropes had at one end a rude iron hook, and taking one of them Canaris threw it over the wall, retaining the other end in his hand.

He pulled it in a yard or two and then the rope became suddenly taut. The hook was secure. He took a sharp glance around him, measured with his ear the hoarse shouts that still rose from the slave market, and then went nimbly up the rope, hand over hand. He reached the top in safety.

"Now fasten the stuff on," he whispered down; "put the other ropes in the bag."

Guy obeyed instructions, and Canaris rapidly drew the string up. He then speedily hooked a second rope to the wall and dropped it down.

"Fasten Forbes to one rope, and come up the other yourself," he called out to Chutney.

Here a difficulty arose. Melton was of course unable to climb the rope, and if a noose was slipped under his arms the wound would be torn and lacerated by the strain.

"It's no use, Chutney," he said. "I foresaw this. You must get off without me."

Guy was in despair. He was just on the point of bidding Canaris make his escape alone when a happy thought struck him.

"I have it, Melton," he cried joyfully. "Have you much power in your arms?"

"Yes," said Melton, "but not enough to go up that rope."

"That's all right. I don't want you to go up the rope," returned Guy.

"Here, put your feet together and stand straight."

Hastily noosing the rope, he drew the knot tightly about Melton's legs just above the knee.

"You take a good grip with your hands," he added. "There won't be much strain on your wound, and we'll have you on the top in a jiffy."

Melton obeyed instructions, and Guy pulled himself speedily to the top.

"Crouch down," said Canaris; "don't you see that watch tower?" and he pointed to a dim mass rising from the wall some distance off. "That is the nearest tower," he added. "I hardly think they can see us, but it is better to take precautions."

The other two ropes were already dangling on the outer side of the wall. Canaris had planned everything for an emergency.

Guy took a hasty glance at the roofs and battlements spread before them on one side, the moonlit landscape on the other, and then he whispered down, "All right, Melton?"

"Yes, go ahead," came the faint reply.

"Quick, they are coming!" cried Canaris in sudden excitement, and as he spoke a yell went up close at hand, and three or four dark figures turned the corner of the nearest slave prison.

A big Somali was in the lead, and spying Melton he raised his spear.

"You fiend!" cried Guy, and lifting a loose stone from the wall he hurled it down.

It struck the spear from the rascal's hand, and before he could recover himself Guy and Canaris had dragged Melton to the summit of the wall by a prodigious effort.

"Down, down!" cried Canaris, and as they crouched low three or four spears went over their heads, and a hoarse shout of rage went up from the baffled Somalis that was caught up and repeated far back into the town.

"Keep cool," cautioned Canaris; "the ropes are up; they can't reach us. Five minutes more and——" The words froze on his lips. Loud above the shouts of the savages rose a harsh, metallic sound that vibrated in shuddering echoes through the night air. It was the beating of the tomtom at the Emir's palace.

An electric circuit could not have more speedily roused the town. A vast sullen roar went up instantly, and then mingled with the clang of the tomtom and the tumult of the people rang out a harsh rattle of alarm drums that swelled and spread until every oval watch turret on the town walls was sounding the tocsin announcing to the subjects of Rao Khan the escape of the hated Englishmen.

CHAPTER XV.—THE PURSUIT.

"Now for it," cried Canaris. "Don't be scared. In two minutes we'll be out of reach of these savages."

His appearance belied his words, for he was trembling with fright. The rope about Melton's legs had not been loosed, and he was instantly lowered on the other side. In less time than it takes to tell Guy and Canaris had joined him, and all three felt the solid earth beneath their feet again.

The situation was now extremely critical. The tomtom still rang out from the palace and the drums were beating in the watch towers, though their volume of sound could be heard but faintly above the constantly increasing roar of the maddened people.

The fugitives had scaled the wall at a point on the western side of the city very close to the southern angle ; the western gate was still more remote, and from these gates the pursuit must come.

That it would come quickly no one could doubt, for the rabble of Somalis who had led the chase through the market place had by this time reached the gates with the tidings of the fugitives' escape over the wall.

Canaris took a bag and a rifle and Guy followed his example.

Not a second of time was lost, but turning to the southwest they dashed down the long slanting hill toward the valley that opened clear and distinct at their feet. Their ears rang with the horrid din and turmoil, and this spurred them on to greater efforts as they plunged forward with great strides.

At the angle of the wall stood a watch tower, and from this coign of vantage the guards saw the fleeing fugitives, outlined by the treacherous moonlight.

Crack ! crack ! crack ! rang their rifles, and the bullets whistled keenly through the air, but the flying figures went straight on, and speedily vanished over the hill crest.

The valley beneath the town was skimmed across, and then scaling a low stone wall they plunged into the shadow of a big plantation and ran on between rows of limes and coffee trees.

Guy feared that the Arabs who owned these orchards would join in the pursuit, but Canaris assured him that there was little danger of that. An uproar in the town, he declared, was always the signal for the dwellers outside the walls to shut themselves in their houses.

A danger from another source, however, threatened them, for with a furious growl a great dog came bounding on behind, and by his loud outcry made the location of the fugitives very plain to their enemies.

The brute persistently followed them up, snapping at their heels and baying loudly. No stones could be found, and to use firearms would only make matters worse. On the farther side of the plantation, however, the dog stopped and uttered a long drawn howl that was caught up in echoes across the valley.

"I'm giving out," cried Melton faintly. "You'll have to leave me."

Canaris turned on him fiercely.

"Do you hear the mad fiends howling behind us? They are scattering over the country, and if we are caught, good by," and he whipped his hand across his throat. "You must keep up, only half a mile yet, and I'll hide you so securely that the fiends can never find us."

"You hear?" added Guy. "Only half a mile yet, Melton, and then rest."

But all this encouragement was of little use. Forbes was suffering now from the reaction, and his strength was almost gone. A sound of shouting suddenly rose from the valley, and taking Melton by the arms they fairly dragged him along.

A hill now loomed up before them, and clutching stones and limbs of trees they made their way painfully to the summit.

Looking toward the town they could see torches moving to and fro across the valley, and twinkling through the leafy avenues of the plantation.

Their old enemy, the dog, began to howl again, but a rifle shot speedily cut his career short.

"Poor dog," said Guy; "they have killed him. He was only defending his master's property."

As they hastened down the western slope of the hill the sound of water broke on their hearing, and then the stream came in view, a swift and narrow torrent brawling over rocks and ledges.

Guy ran ahead, and filling his helmet, offered it to Melton, who drank deeply.

"I feel like a new man," he cried; "that was splendid."

Canaris now led them down the stream for some distance until a shallow place permitted them to wade across. The valley had become a gorge. The sloping hills gave way to great frowning masses of rock so high and so close that no moonlight pierced the shadows. Finally the Greek stopped and pointed above his head.

"We must climb the rocks," he said. "Are you equal to it?"

Melton looked dubiously at the steep side of the gorge, but before he could reply Canaris started up, and he had no alternative but to follow. Guy came close behind to catch his friend if he should give out.

The ascent, however, was not so bad as it looked. Canaris picked his way with great skill, winding along the face of the cliff in a zigzag manner. Had it been daylight dizziness would have caused them to lose their heads, for the gulf below grew deeper every moment, and at places the path was but a foot wide.

At length Canaris climbed over a big rock that barred the way, and then assisted Melton and Guy to the top.

"Here we are," he said cheerily, "and just as safe as though we were in the Acropolis at Athens."

They stood on a small plateau, protected by a low parapet of jagged rocks that extended in a half circle. The top of the cliff was close over their heads, and behind them was a natural grotto scooped concavely out of the solid rock. It was a perfect hiding place and a splendid point of defense in case of an attack.

Melton dropped feebly on the stone floor, and Guy and the Greek sat down against the parapet. Reaction had come to all of them. Now they were really safe, the terror and excitement of the flight was visible on their faces. Their clothes were soaking wet, and the perspiration rolled down their cheeks.

"Look," exclaimed Canaris, leaning over the parapet, "look down there!"

He pointed into the gorge, and Guy, glancing down, saw torches flaring against the rocky walls, revealing in their glow dark, swiftly moving figures, and weird shadows dancing on the waters of the torrent.

Canaris observed Guy's expression of alarm, for he said calmly: "Don't fear. We are perfectly safe; try and sleep some; you need rest badly."

Canaris stretched himself out flat, and, after making sure that Melton was sleeping—for the poor fellow's weariness was greater than the pain of the wound—Guy, too, lay down on the hard rock, and fell instantly asleep.

Dawn had been very near when they reached their hiding place. Through the early hours of the morning they slept on, heedless of the loud cries, the sounds of anger and wrath that floated up from the shadows of the gorge, and when the sun was past its meridian, Guy awoke. Canaris stretched himself and sat up at the same time.

Their first thought was of Melton. He was still sleeping, but it was a restless, uneasy slumber, for he tossed about and moaned.

The heat was now very great, and they suffered terribly from thirst. Far below they could hear the water rushing over its stony bed, and the sound was maddening.

Even had any one dared to attempt that perilous descent in the broad light of day, there would have been danger from another source, for all that afternoon Somalis and Arabs in large and small parties passed up and down the gorge, even scanning at times the rocky sides of the cliff, but never for a moment suspecting the close proximity of those they sought.

At last Melton awoke. He was weak and feverish. His wound had opened, and his clothes were heavy with stiffened blood. He complained bitterly of thirst, and talked at times in a rambling, excited manner.

"He's in a bad way," said the Greek. "We must leave here as soon as night comes, and as he is too ill to walk, he must be carried."

"What do you propose to do?" asked Guy.

"Well," rejoined Canaris, "we shall travel only at night. If all goes well, we will be fifty miles distant in four or five days, and on the fifth night we shall reach our journey's end."

"Our journey's end?" queried Guy.

"Yes; our land journey at least, for we shall then be at the entrance to the underground river."

CHAPTER XVI.—BESIEGED.

THE African sun had gone down, leaving only a reddish tinge against the western horizon, when the three fugitives left their refuge and climbed to the top of the cliff. In the dim twilight it was impossible to make out the country which lay vaguely outspread at their feet.

Canaris made a rude stretcher of branches, and, arranging Melton as comfortably as possible, they started away. The top of the gorge sloped on this side into a valley, and following this for some distance they finally reached more open country.

No trace of their pursuers was seen. They had all gone back to Harar, for none ever remained outside the walls at night, Canaris declared.

Soon a small stream was reached, where they lunched and quenched their thirst. Canaris washed Melton's wound, and bound it up in soft, wet bandages. After a while the moon came out, and they could see for some distance on either side.

It seemed strange to reflect that they were now traveling through a vast and absolutely unexplored part of Africa. All was wild and desolate, for Harar and its vicinity once left behind, no villages or habitations were found.

The cries of various animals echoed from the forest, and once a lion roared loudly; but without molestation from man or beast our little party toiled on painfully until dawn.

They carried Melton every step of the way, and when they halted in a glade close by a pool, he was sleeping soundly.

Either the fresh water or the long rest had helped him, for when night came again he was able to walk, and day by day he grew better.

For three nights they journeyed to the southward, sleeping all day in secluded spots.

The wisdom of night travel was plainly seen, for they often discovered camp fires gleaming on each side of them, and on one occasion nearly ran into a wandering group of Gallas, while from their hiding place during the day they saw caravans and hordes of natives journeying to and fro.

The night had its disadvantages too, for twice they were attacked by howling animals, and on one occasion had to climb trees while a herd of elephants went trumpeting past. Fortunately, more dangerous beasts kept their distance.

The third night's journey led them through a most unusually rich and fertile country, miles of mellow pasturage watered by many streams, bits of forest land, and meadows clumped with bushes and patches of trees, while on both sides were the dark profiles of huge mountains.

That day they slept on the side of a hill among great rocks, and when they were preparing to start at sundown, Canaris said briefly:

"We ought to reach our journey's end before morning."

Of the stores they had brought along there now remained but a handful of crumbs. Guy was deeply concerned over the question of supplies for their voyage in case the underground river was discovered, but Canaris bade him not to worry until the time came.

With feelings which it would be difficult to describe, they resumed their night march. An unknown future, full of terrors and fears, yawned before them.

It is hard to say what guided Canaris in the direction he took. He had once been over the ground, but it was scarcely possible that he could remember the road so well. He strode on full of confidence, however, his rifle over his shoulder and his revolver ready for use in his right hand. Guy and Melton followed behind in single file.

They made slow progress, for Canaris led them in among mountain gorges, and they were compelled to ford streams and clamber painfully over big stones.

At last they emerged again on more open ground and traveled through patches of waving grass and scrub, keeping parallel all the while with two mountain ranges that lay to the right and left. The land was full of rolling swells like ocean waves, and as they passed over the crest of one of these

ridges a sudden gleam of moonlight shining on water some distance off riveted their attention.

As they descended into the hollow it was hidden from view. Several times the Greek halted and scrutinized his surroundings closely. He was not altogether satisfied, for he no longer strode on confidently, but walked with a hesitating step. Guy and Melton shared his anxiety.

"What's wrong?" inquired the former. "Have you missed the way, Canaris?"

"I don't know," replied the Greek. "We must stop soon and wait for daylight. We ought to be close to the stone kraal by this time."

While conversing they had crossed another slight swell, and they were half way down the hollow when a hoarse cry from Melton brought them to a halt.

The scene before them was enough to appall the stoutest heart. Twenty yards away lay a broad pool of water and along its sandy edge were grouped half a dozen great lions, some lapping up the water greedily, others sitting lazily on their haunches, waiting no doubt for some fat deer to pass that way.

A low chorus of growls greeted the approach of the travelers, and made them shiver from head to foot.

"Shall I fire?" whispered Guy excitedly.

"No, for your life, no," retorted Canaris. "Back up the hill as silently as possible. Don't shoot unless we are attacked."

With arms in readiness they moved backward step by step. The lions began to pace up and down the strip of sand, tossing their shaggy heads toward the frightened men, and then the leader, a monstrous fellow with a mane that swept the ground, advanced a few paces and uttered a tremendous roar that seemed to shake the earth.

Guy cocked his rifle, but at the sharp click Canaris turned on him fiercely.

"Don't shoot," he whispered. "Don't shoot. If we can get over the ridge we may escape. I don't think they will attack us."

In a moment more they reached the crest of the slope. The lions were still down by the pool.

"Look," exclaimed Canaris, pointing to the right. "Do you see those rocks! We must make a run for them."

The spot referred to was a dim mass rising out of the plain some fifty yards distant. Whether they really were rocks or not it was hard to tell.

Another fearful roar put an end to indecision, and they ran at the top of their speed toward the hoped for refuge. No one glanced behind. In imagination they felt the hot breath on their necks and heard the soft patter through the grass.

Then the refuge was before them, a tall column of rock rising from a clump of jungle grass and some low, stunted timber.

It towered up in ledges and in a trice Canaris had sprung upon the first platform, and extended a helping hand to his companions.

With frantic haste they climbed another jutting ledge and pulled themselves to the top. None too soon, for as they turned to look, the big lion

sprang into the air and landed with a roar of baffled rage on the ledge beneath their hoped for prey.

He rose instantly for another spring, but as he reared upward Guy brought down the butt of his rifle on the massive head and the beast rolled down into the jungle at the foot of the rock.

Another lion loomed up in the shadows, and together the two paced to and fro, lashing their tails and growling with fury.

"That was a narrow escape," said Guy. "A moment more and we would have been caught."

"We're not altogether safe yet," replied Canaris. "Those are hungry looking brutes, and it's hard to tell what they may do. We must remain quiet and watch them closely."

The two lions continued to prowl up and down, licking their chops and occasionally glancing at the top of the rock. Suddenly they halted in the middle of their beat, and, pricking up their ears, assumed an expectant attitude.

"They hear something," said Guy. "I wonder what it can be."

For a full minute the two noble beasts stood like bits of statuary, not a muscle quivering, their tails slowly waving to and fro. Then with a couple of bounds they vanished in the high grass.

"The siege is raised," exclaimed Guy, breathing a low sigh of relief.

"Hush," replied Canaris, "not a sound, not a whisper for your lives. Down, down, crouch low; throw yourselves flat!"

His voice was tremulous with sudden fear, and his hand shook as he pointed one nerveless finger in the direction taken by the lions.

"Look, look!" he muttered with chattering teeth. "One sound and we are doomed."

CHAPTER XVII.—A CLOSE SHAVE.

THE Greek's extreme terror sprang from no insignificant cause. Over the crest of a ridge some thirty yards distant came a large body of men. It was very evident that they would pass close to the rock, and the three fugitives, crouching on its flat surface in the gloom, may well be pardoned for believing that the enemy were on their track.

As the advance guard drew still closer, Canaris thrust his face against the stone. Melton did the same; but Guy, whose curiosity fairly mastered his fear, ventured to raise his head slightly, and a single glance showed him that this strange foe had no intention of halting.

They passed within ten yards of the rock, it is true, but not a man looked to right or left, and they moved at a rapid and steady pace.

Guy's amazement grew deeper as the long procession went by in constantly increasing numbers, for even to his unskilled eyes it was plain that these men were neither Arabs nor Somalis.

The dim light revealed their powerful stature, the dark faces crowned with turbans, the linen cloaks that were flung carelessly on their shoulders, and the various arms, comprising shields, swords, spears, and even guns.

At intervals the stalwart figure of a man towered above the rest, mounted high on a camel or an elephant.

Melton and Canaris ventured to raise their heads in response to a nudge from Guy, and all three witnessed the passing of this strange procession, which comprised nearly a hundred men.

As the rear guard vanished over a ridge to the south, Canaris, without a word, swung himself nimbly to the ground and picked up some glittering object that lay in the path.

"Look," he exclaimed in a tone of wonder, as Guy and Melton followed him down, "do you recognize this workmanship? But no, how could you?" he resumed, without waiting for an answer. "This weapon is of Abyssinian make, and those men were Abyssinians."

"But what are they doing here, so far from their own country?" demanded Guy.

"It is a war party," said Canaris, "and we are not so far from the borders of Abyssinia, after all. It is no uncommon thing for them to raid on the Gallas."

The dagger passed from hand to hand, and was inspected with much curiosity, until Canaris pointed toward the east and said: "Morning has come, and the sun will soon be up. Let us climb the rock and make a survey of the country."

Daylight came on with marvelous rapidity, and as the range of vision gradually became clear for a distance of several miles, the Greek rose to his feet and scanned the surroundings with a sweeping gaze.

His countenance expressed first perplexity, then delighted surprise, and turning to his companions he cried:

"We have reached our destination. See! There is the stone kraal, those scattered columns of rock to the south that rise from the jungle. Yes, the old Englishman was right, for yonder lies the Elephant Peak and the Lion's Head."

It was indeed as the Greek said. The broad valley was dotted with a curious rock formation that bore a strong likeness to a native village of huts, and on either side of the valley, from the rugged chains of mountains, rose two lofty peaks, gaunt and scraggy, one fashioned like a recumbent elephant, the other a perfect semblance of a lion's shaggy head.

A murmur of surprise burst from the trio as they gazed long on this strange verification of their hopes.

The mountain peaks were at least four miles distant, for the breadth of the valley was about eight.

For the moment the recent passage of the warlike Abyssinians was forgotten. Then a very significant occurrence recalled it forcibly to their minds.

From the base of the Lion's Head suddenly rose a column of yellow smoke, and two or three gun shots echoed distinctly across the valley.

"The Abyssinians have attacked the town of the Gallas," cried Canaris. "It lies at the foot of that peak, and is the same kraal at which the Englishman was kept in slavery when he discovered the underground river."

"I hope they'll eat each other up like the Kilkenny cats," observed Guy coolly.

"But you don't understand," cried the Greek in strange excitement. "They will scatter over the valley, they will flee to those rocks yonder for protection, and unless we find the entrance to that river at once we are lost."

"Canaris is right," spoke up Melton. "We must make immediate search for the rock with the cross. It is our only hope."

"Yes, our only hope," echoed the Greek. "Come quickly there is no time to lose."

He slipped to the ground and led his companions rapidly down the valley, toward the stone village.

They hastened on among the scattered rocks for a quarter of a mile or more, until the extreme southern edge was reached, and then Canaris stopped.

"This is the south side," he said; "we must search the rocks for one with a cross."

They scattered, Guy toward the west, Melton to the east. It was a time of peril, for the yellow smoke was curling up over the Lion's Head in heavier columns, and the firing was more distinct, as though the conflict was spreading toward them across the valley.

"The rock with the cross, on the south side of the stone kraal." A simple enough direction on the face of it, and yet the eager searchers, as they hurried from stone to stone, scrutinizing every side and angle, failed to discover the faintest trace of anything resembling a cross.

Canaris wrung his hands in dismay when they came together after the fruitless search.

"We are lost, we are lost!" he groaned. "What will become of us? Go, make another search; inspect the base of every stone; the hidden entrance must exist."

Guy shook his head.

"That cross was made twenty years ago," he said. "In that time the storms could have destroyed all trace of it unless the Englishman carved it very deep, and in that event we should have discovered it already."

"It must be found," persisted Canaris in his terror. "Hark! The firing is coming nearer. In half an hour the valley will swarm with savage foes. Go! Go! Go!"

He fairly shrieked out the last words, and threw himself in despair down amid the jungle grass.

The Greek did not exaggerate the danger. A startling confirmation of his fears were at hand.

Warned in time by a commotion in the bushes, Guy and Melton dropped flat, as a savage, spear in hand, and bleeding from a wound in the head, burst out of the jungle twenty yards distant and made full speed for a rock a few yards to the north of that by which the Englishmen lay concealed.

All unconscious of the three pairs of eyes watching his movements, he stooped, flung the tangled grass madly aside, and, rolling a loose stone from the base of the rock, revealed a dark cavity in the smooth side.

He threw a frightened glance in the direction he had come, and, dropping his spear and diving into the hole, pulled the stone back in place from within.

All this happened in less time than it takes to tell.

"Saved!" burst thankfully from Guy's lips as he sprang to his feet.

"Saved!" echoed Melton and Canaris.

Snatching up their baggage, they dashed across the narrow space that divided the two great boulders. Guy tore the rock from the entrance, and, as the imprisoned savage within uttered a hoarse cry, he pointed his rifle at the opening.

"Go ahead," called out Melton; "he's unarmed; he can't harm you."

Guy hesitated for an instant, and then crawled into the forbidding cavern on hands and knees.

A distant sound of scuffling and rattling of stones told that the savage was retreating into the bowels of the earth.

Melton handed in the rifles and baggage, and crawled in after them. Canaris was the last to enter, and with Melton's aid the stone, which was round in shape, was pulled back against the entrance, and all was darkness, save for one crevice an inch or two wide.

The Greek peered sharply through this, and then exclaimed in a low whisper: "We are just in time. A party of Abyssinians are approaching through the jungle in pursuit of the Galla fugitive."

"Hush!" he added; "don't make a sound; they are coming directly toward the rock."

CHAPTER XVIII.—THE UNDERGROUND RIVER.

A MOMENT of terrible suspense followed the Greek's announcement. From without could be plainly heard a chorus of angry shouts as the Abyssinians searched for their missing prey.

Then the sounds grew fainter and Canaris said quietly: "They have gone on past the rock. We had better strike a light and see what has become of that black rascal. I cannot understand how he knew anything about this place. It may not be the proper entrance after all."

One of the bronze lamps was filled with palm oil and lighted, and Guy undertook to lead the way into the depths of the cavern.

The passage was amply large enough to hold two or three men standing up, and it led downward at a very sharp angle. The journey was performed in silence, and after traveling ten or fifteen minutes Guy stopped.

A vast empty space was before him, and at his feet lay a sharp slope of loose earth. Here were seen the tracks of the savage, and without hesitation Guy began the descent, and half crawling, half sliding, reached firm ground a few yards below.

Melton and Canaris were close behind, and together they went on into the vast expanse of the cavern. Under foot was hard, compact sand, and in a moment more the glare of the lamp was reflected on running water, and they stood on the brink of the mysterious underground river.

"We have found it?" exclaimed Canaris exultingly. "The Englishman was right."

It was impossible to judge of the width of the stream. It might be very narrow and it might be very broad. The flowing water made not a sound, and yet the current was swift, for a bit of paper that Melton tossed in was snatched from sight immediately.

As they gazed on this strange sight with emotions that it would be impossible to describe, a vague, shadowy object passed down the stream and vanished in the darkness.

"There goes that fellow," cried Guy. "He has escaped in a canoe," and hastening up along the shore, waving the lamp in front of him, he uttered a cry of astonishment that echoed through the cavern and brought his companions quickly to his side.

Drawn back a few yards from the water lay two long, heavy canoes, and a sharp furrow in the sand leading to the river's edge showed that a third canoe had recently stood beside the others. Half a dozen rude paddles were strewn on the sand. The savage had evidently been in such haste to escape that the thought of turning the other canoes adrift, and thus eluding pursuit, never entered his head.

Beyond the canoes; further progress was blocked by masses of earth.

"This was the abode of that strange race of natives," said Guy solemnly, "and under those stones they have lain buried since the earthquake years ago."

He turned and led the way down the stream.

Fifteen yards below lay another jutting mass of earth. This was the extent of the cavern, a beach fifty yards long running back to the narrow passage and terminated by walls of earth; beyond was darkness and the river, running none knew where.

Yet the only hope of seeing home and friends, vague and uncertain as it was, rested with this mysterious, cavernous stream. It might lead to the coast and safety, but far more likely death and destruction awaited any one daring enough to trust himself to its treacherous current.

"The sea is hundreds of miles away," said Guy gloomily, as he sat down on the sand and placed the lamp carefully beside him. "How are we going to live through such a journey as that? Even now our last bit of food is gone, and where shall we get more?"

Canaris pondered a moment before he ventured to reply.

"I see but one plan," he said finally. "At nightfall we must visit the burned village. The enemy will have gone by then, and we may discover abandoned provisions."

"If we could shoot any game——" began Melton, but Guy interrupted him.

"The fighting has scared everything away from the vicinity," he remarked.

"Yes, that is true," said the Greek. "The animals have fled to the mountains, and, besides, Oko Sam and his tribe of Gallas keep the game well thinned out."

"What did you say?" cried Guy, springing to his feet in excitement. "Is this Oko Sam's village yonder that the Abyssinians have raided?"

The Greek nodded assent.

"Yes, Oko Sam is the chief."

"Then Sir Arthur Ashby and Colonel Carrington are close at hand," exclaimed Guy.

"And Momba," added Melton fervently. "All may be saved yet."

"And was it to Oko Sam your comrades were sold as slaves?" cried Canaris. "Why did you not mention his name before? I could have told you this long ago."

"I never thought of it," rejoined Guy. "I gave them up as lost forever. Alas! they are probably in the hands of the Abyssinians now."

"Either that or dead," said the Greek, "but undoubtedly the former, for Menelek, the Abyssinian king, is fond of white captives, and their lives would be spared if they fell into the hands of the raiding party."

"And how shall we find out?" demanded Guy. "I will not embark on this river until uncertainty about their fate is removed."

"When darkness comes we will leave the cavern," replied Canaris. "It is possible we shall learn something. Until then have patience."

The hours of tedious waiting were a little relieved by a discovery that Melton made.

In some of the canoes he found a couple of rude bone fishhooks. This seemed pretty fair proof that fish existed in the underground river, and as Guy happened to have a roll of cord, three strong lines were constructed and laid away for possible future use.

When, to the best of their judgments, evening was close at hand, they started back through the passage and reached the entrance shortly before ten o'clock.

Darkness soon came on, and as all seemed quiet they ventured to roll back the stone and crawl out. Far across the valley a faint glow was visible against the somber sky, probably from the smoldering embers of the burned village, while directly north of the cavern, in the vicinity of the pool of water where the lions had been encountered the previous night, and a number of camp fires were twinkling merrily through the scattered boulders.

"This is the camp of the Abyssinians," declared Canaris without hesitation. "One of us must spy into it and see if your friends are prisoners; another must go to the village for provisions, and a third man should remain here at the mouth of the cavern."

This proposed division of the forces did not please Guy and Melton.

"Why must a man remain at the cavern?" demanded Chutney.

"To mark the place in case one of us is pursued and loses his bearings in the darkness," was the Greek's calm reply.

Guy saw the advisability of this and made no further objection. After brief discussion it was decided that he should remain on guard, while Canaris visited the village and Forbes reconnoitered the Abyssinian camp. Without any delay they started off on their respective missions and Guy was left alone.

For a while he paced up and down before the cavern, his rifle in the hollow of his arm, and then sitting down on the round stone he reflected over his perilous situation and the strange train of events that had led up to it. The stars shining down on him from the blackness of the African sky seemed to whisper of his far away English home and the friends he would probably never see again.

Then he thought of his comrades in India and the expedition he had so fondly hoped to join, that even now was fighting its way through the hills of Chittagong. His reverie was broken by a sharp "hist!" and Forbes glided swiftly out of the gloom.

"No, they have not been captured," he whispered in response to Guy's eager inquiries. "I was around the camp on all sides. The Abyssinians have secured some Galla prisoners, and among them the chief himself, Oko Sam, but none of our friends are there. I am terribly afraid they have been massacred, Chutney."

"We will know when the Greek returns," replied Guy, who did not care to admit his belief Melton was right.

They sat down together by the rock and conversed in low tones. An hour passed and then another.

"Canaris should be here by this time," said Guy uneasily. "Can anything have happened to him, I wonder?"

Almost as he spoke a muffled trampling sound was heard, two huge objects loomed out of the darkness ahead, and as Guy's hand trembled on the trigger of his rifle the Greek's familiar voice uttered a low exclamation and he advanced slowly, leading two big camels loaded down with trappings.

"Well by Jove——" began Guy, but Canaris checked him instantly.

"Not so loud. I picked up these animals only a quarter of a mile back. They have strayed away from the Abyssinian camp."

"But tell me, what have you discovered?" exclaimed Guy. "And you have brought no food. Must we starve, then?"

CHAPTER XIX.—A DARING EXPEDITION.

"I HAVE discovered this," replied Canaris. "The Gallas are preparing for an attack; fresh men have come in from distant towns. They are encamped at the edge of the burned village, and in a small hut, which is surrounded by guards, your friends, I am confident are confined. The struggle was a severe one, for the ground is strewn with dead, both Gallas and Abyssinians. I could find no food, and what we are to do I cannot tell. To attempt a rescue would be madness, and yet our sufferings would only end the sooner. Without food we can make no use of the river, and escape in any other way is equally impossible."

Canaris threw himself to the ground and buried his face in his hands. Guy stood in silence, his face stern and set, a silence that remained unbroken for five minutes. In that space of time his fertile mind had sought a way out of the difficulty and grasped an expedient so daring, so preposterous that he hesitated to frame it in words.

His face betrayed something of his emotions, for Forbes and Canaris exclaimed eagerly: "What is it, Chutney? You have thought of something, have you?"

"Yes," said Guy. "I have. As you say, the case is desperate. If my plan fails we can be no worse off. What I have resolved to do is this: Forbes will remain at the cavern. You and I, Canaris, will stain our faces to pass for Portuguese, and mounted on these camels, we will ride boldly into the camp of the Gallas and proclaim ourselves messengers from Makar Makalo at Zaila. We will say that the English are hard pressing the town, that they agree to withdraw on condition that the English prisoners are returned safe and sound, and that Makar has sent us to bring them to the coast. We will add, furthermore, that we came as far as yonder mountains with a caravan bound for Harar, and to allay any suspicions they may have, we will ask for an escort of two men to accompany us to Zaila and receive the money which Makar will pay for the safe delivery of the Englishmen. If all goes well they will give up our friends and load us with provisions for a long journey. The escort we can easily dispose of, and then for the river and freedom!"

Guy snapped his fingers exultantly as he concluded the recital of his daring plan and waited to see how his friends would receive it.

"Marvelous!" cried Forbes, drawing a long breath.

"Yes, it is marvelous," added the Greek, "truly marvelous. If it succeeds it will be a miracle indeed. But suppose they have received recent news from Zaila, or that our disguise is penetrated?"

"As for that," replied Guy coolly, "we must take the chances. I should fear recognition most from Oko Sam, but he is fortunately a prisoner among the Abyssinians. Make up your minds, quickly. Do you agree to my proposal or not? Perhaps you can devise a better plan."

"We will try it," said Canaris, decidedly. "It must be done at once, for at daybreak the Gallas will advance to attack the Abyssinians. Make your preparations, and we will be off." Stepping up to the camels, which were quietly grazing on the jungle grass, he proceeded to remove every part of their trappings which would betray its Abyssinian make, until only the simple covering remained. With a cry of delight he held up two white burnouses that had been fastened to the saddle bags, and said:

"With these on and our faces darkened it will take a clever man to penetrate our disguise in the night time."

It was not such an easy matter to stain their faces, but with the application of a little moist earth from the mouth of the cavern, it was finally accomplished to their satisfaction, and after a hasty review of their plans and a code of instructions for Melton's guidance during their absence, the two daring adventurers mounted their camels and rode slowly off into the darkness toward the hostile camp of the Gallas.

It was very near midnight, and as they trotted briskly across the desert, sounds of mirth floated on the air from the camp where the Abyssinians were making merry over their victory, serenely ignorant of the surprise that dawn was to bring them.

The distant glow ahead seemed to come nearer and nearer with every stride of the camels, and Guy could hardly believe that nearly four miles had been traversed when Canaris pointed out the camp just in front of them.

It was too late to think of retreat now, for already the approach of the camels was detected and a host of dark figures were visible moving across the still glowing embers.

Fearful of an attack, Canaris shouted out loudly, "Makar Makalo! Makar Makalo!" and then, lashing his beast, they galloped into the very center of a turbulent throng, who crowded around them with blazing torches.

Canaris knew barely enough of the language to request an interpreter and the head man of the tribe, and the savages, awed for a moment by the fierce manner in which he made these demands, fell back a little, and Guy had opportunity to observe his surroundings.

He was in a corner of the village which seemed to have escaped the worst of the fray, for a dozen or more huts were standing, and the largest of these was encircled by a dozen heavily armed men. His heart beat fast at the thought that Sir Arthur and Colonel Carrington were confined within.

Just then a huge savage, wearing a leopard skin about his waist, advanced through the crowd, who fell back at his approach. He was accompanied by a small, wizened Arab who at once demanded if the newcomers could "spik Inglis?"

"Go ahead now," whispered Canaris, "and luck be with you. That big fellow is the head man."

For a moment Guy could find no voice to reply, and failure stared him in the face.

The horrified expression on the Greek's countenance broke the spell, and raising his voice he said clearly and distinctly:

"Tell your master we are Portuguese who have come from Zaila at the bidding of Makar Makalo, the ruler."

The Arab communicated this piece of news in a loud tone that drew a murmur of surprise from the people, but brought no response from the chief, who merely stared impudently.

"The English have made an attack on Zaila by land and sea," Guy went on in a louder voice. "The town is at their mercy. They have promised Makar to withdraw on condition that the British governor of the town and his friend, who were taken and sold into slavery, be delivered up to them safely. Therefore Makar Makalo has sent us to demand of you the two Englishmen, a supply of food for the journey, and an escort back to Zaila. For this he agrees to reward you well. We came as far as yonder mountain with a caravan bound for Harar, and as there is great need of haste we would start on our return at once."

This long speech the Arab likewise proclaimed aloud, and with the utmost anxiety Guy and Canaris watched its effect on the people.

They heard it in ominous silence, and the chief spoke a few words to his interpreter, who instantly turned to Guy and announced, in very imperfect English, that nothing could be done until Oko Sam was released from his captivity. He told briefly of the attack on the village, of their plan for sur-

prising the Abyssinians at daybreak, and concluded by inviting them to dismount and await the result of the fight.

It was evident at least that nothing was suspected. So far they had played their part to perfection. But here was an unexpected hindrance. The leader refused to act without the sanction of Oko Sam, and a delay would be fatal.

"Insist on it," whispered Canaris hurriedly; "it's our only chance."

"Tell your master we cannot wait," replied Guy, in well feigned anger. "Every moment is precious, and we must hasten back to Makar Makalo. Give us the Englishmen at once or we will go away without them and tell Makar Makalo how you have treated his messengers."

This bold declaration had its effect.

The chief withdrew to a little distance and held a long conference with half a dozen of his companions.

Guy and Canaris remained calm and motionless on their camels, haughtily scanning the sea of threatening black faces that hemmed them in on all sides.

Their only ground for hope rested in the fear which Makar Makalo, by his summary dealings with these tribes, had inspired in them.

The single motive which in all probability hindered the head man from acceding at once to their demands was the dread of Oko Sam's displeasure in case that despotic monarch were rescued in the morning.

The eager confab was still going on as strenuously as ever when a tumult arose from the outskirts of the throng, and presently, amid hoarse cheering and applause, a man broke through the parted ranks of the people and limped feebly into the open space.

It was Oko Sam!

William Murray Graydon.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

HER SMILE.

Of all her smiles the dearest
Is that which takes its rise
Where love shines forth the clearest—
In and about her eyes.

It sparkles there and twinkles,
Then slyly downward goes;
While tiny little wrinkles
Nestle about her nose.

Its sweetness unabating,
At last it lightly slips
To where, impatient waiting,
I kiss it—on her lips.

S. Decatur Smith.

THE MOTHER OF THE WATERS.

A memorable experience in the Brazilian rubber districts—The attack in the dark and the strange disposition that was made of the captive whose peril surpasses his own realization of it.

NELSON put his feet on the veranda rail and tipped back in his chair in good American fashion, shoving the cigar box across the table toward me at the same time. His wife had just left us to attend to some household duty, and Nelse was evidently in the mood for a confidential chat.

"Try one of these," he said, nodding toward the cigars. "I never could take kindly to these cigarettes the South Americans smoke, though Tharese them likes to roll them for me of an evening, and I smoke them to please her—bless her heart!"

"You certainly are a fortunate fellow, Nelse," I said. "This was my first visit to Para, and I was spending most of the time at my friend's *hacienda* just outside the city. He had come out to Brazil ten years before in the service of an American rubber company, had married, and I found him in most comfortable circumstances, having long since finished his apprenticeship and risen to be the head of the firm's branch house at Para.

"You are a fortunate fellow," I repeated. "If there was another woman like your wife in this country, and she would have me, I'd be strongly tempted to settle here myself."

Nelse laughed a little oddly. "Would you be willing to pay the price?" he asked.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well——" He flipped the ashes from his cigar and looked at me from under the broad brim of his hat. "Jacob served for Rachel, you know. Let me tell you how I served for Tharese."

I settled myself to listen. I knew if Nelse hadn't forgotten how, the story would be told in a manner worth listening to.

"You know I came out here a green young chap of two or three and twenty—just out of college and with plaguy little experience in practical business life. It always was a wonder that the firm sent me any way, I was so young. But my responsibilities weren't so great at first.

"The branch here in Para was at that time in the hands of a Spaniard by the name of Manuel Diaz. I was under his orders, and he kept an oversight over me—broke me into the manner of conducting business here, and taught me the language so that in a few months I could get along first rate.

"Another thing he did was to take me right into his family. That settled it with me," added Nelse, with a little twist of his thin lips. "Tharese was a member of the household, and if ever a young idiot fell in love at first sight, I was that individual."

"Don't blame you," I murmured.

"Oh, you don't, eh? Well, you ought to. Manuel Diaz was her cousin, had been made her guardian by her father on his death bed, and they had been betrothed for three years. She was then seventeen. He was thirty five. I was twenty three. Nice combination, wasn't it?"

Nelse smoked a few moments in reflective silence.

"I'll say this much in extenuation of my idiocy: I didn't know they were engaged until I had been in the house for some time and my attentions to Tharese had become such as to cause remark. Tharese was a regular little coquette (she was just out of a convent, and had seen mighty little of the world), and I don't suppose she really cared a snap for either Diaz or myself. I had no reason to know they were bound to each other by ties which these Spanish and Portuguese look upon as most sacred.

"I don't suppose little Tharese ever stopped to think whether she cared anything for her cousin or not. It is the proper thing for girls here to marry—and marry young, too. Usually the matter is all arranged by their parents, and the girls are married so young that they haven't seen enough men to have any choice. Tharese accepted my open admiration in the most matter of fact way possible, and I thought I was getting on swimmingly, until Manuel's mother took me aside one evening—oh, she was a stunning old senora!—and told me what dangerous ground I was treading upon.

"I hadn't noticed Manuel's changed manner before; you see, I hadn't had eyes for anybody, or anything, but Tharese. But when my eyes *were* once opened I saw that the Spaniard 'had it in' for me, and had only kept down his spleen by a mighty effort. I possessed sense enough to see that that was no place for me, and I lit out for a hotel, and, to tell you the truth, Bob, I carried a mighty sore heart with me.

"Diaz treated me better when I so plainly showed my intention of not dabbling in his love affairs; but fate seemed to be against our getting on amicably. I swear I kept as far away from his house and from places where Tharese might be, as the limits of the city would allow; but I'll be hanged if I wasn't running up against her at all sorts of times and places. I believe now the minx did it on purpose. The fact that I had left her cousin's house so abruptly rather piqued her. Senora Diaz was almost always with her, for girls in this country do not go about much without chaperons, and of course Manuel received a full and particular account of each meeting.

"I tell you what it is, Bob, I had every expectation of getting a knife between my ribs some night, for life, in those days at least, was not held in too high regard in Para. These dagoes have a nasty way of sticking a man whom they dislike and inquiring into what he has really done after the proceedings are of absolutely no interest to him. But I'll say this for Diaz: he restrained himself wonderfully. At least, I thought he did at the time.

"But I hadn't been in Para three months when I received notice that I had been removed from the office here and was to proceed up the river to a smaller station. I think that Diaz was at the bottom of this exchange, although he professed great disappointment at my enforced departure. The station I was sent to was under his general jurisdiction, and he went up with

me to introduce me to my new associates and look over the accounts of my predecessor. We went up in one of the company's vessels to Santarem, and then Diaz found a woodskin, paddled by two most villainous looking natives, to take us the rest of the way.

"The little station in which my superiors had chosen to bury me was four days' journey beyond Santarem, and the deeper we got into the wilderness the less I liked it. Had not Diaz been with me I believe I should have been afraid of the two Indians. They looked fully capable of halting at some favorable point, building a fire, and roasting us over the coals for supper some night, just as they did the monkeys they shot during the day. Somehow, those moukeys, when they were prepared for the table, looked awfully human and I could not bring myself to eat them.

"But whether the natives were cannibals or not, they belonged to one of the most degraded tribes of the Selvas. They were ignorant, besotted heathen, and intercourse with the worse element of the white race, always to be found in a new country, had not improved their morals.

"Once during the journey, while the canoes were skirting the shore, we passed beneath a great overhanging tree. I happened to be lying on my back in the canoe and glancing upward as we entered the arcade made by the arching trees, I saw a great flat head, in which were set two dully burning eyes, dropping slowly down over the canoe. For an instant I was paralyzed; then I gave a yell and pointed at the boa, six or seven feet of whose body could be seen.

"The natives saw it, but instead of bending to their paddles to escape, they dropped them and knelt motionless in the canoe, muttering incantations and bobbing their heads at the awful creature. The odor of the snake almost overpowered me, and I was shaking with fear; but before it could slip down far enough to seize one of us, I grabbed up a paddle and drove the canoe out from beneath the trees.

"Diaz, who had been asleep in the bottom of the canoe, awoke just in time to catch a parting glimpse of the boa.

"'What is it?' he asked.

"'De Mother of de Waters, senior,' replied one of the canoe men, taking his paddle again.

"'Senor Nelson,' said the Spaniard to me, 'you haf had a narrow escape. That was a great water boa—the biggest snake in Brazil' (and he might have added in the world, for that matter," said Nelse in parenthesis). "'These natives worship it; they uever would haf tried to escape if the Mother of the Waters demanded a sacrifice.'

"I felt shaky for the rest of the day; but that was the only adventure we had during the trip. The station was little more than a landing, back of which were several long sheds for the storage of the rubber and a tiny one story building for the use of the superintendent, which onerous position I was to fill. There wasn't another white man within miles—excepting, of course, Diaz. The man who had held the position had already gone up the river to another station.

"The house I was to occupy was comfortable enough, and if the station

hadn't been such a God forsaken spot, I should have been fairly pleased with the prospect. For certain reasons I was glad enough to get away from Para. I felt right bad about Tharese, and I knew I ought to keep as far away from her as possible.

"In one end of one of the warehouses was a little box-like office, and the night of our arrival I left Mantel Diaz at work on the books there when I went up to my quarters about nine o'clock. The servants slept in shanties behind the *hacienda*, and thus I was alone in the house. I entered my bedroom without lighting a lamp, and was just about to remove my coat when I detected a cat-like step behind me. I sprang to the door, but before I could reach it, or cry out, something was thrown over my head and shoulders, and my arms were pinioned to my sides by muscular hands.

"My frantic shouts were muffled in the thick folds of the thing cast over my head, and struggle as I might I was no match for those hands. In a minute I was nicely triced up, arms tied behind my back, and legs fastened so that I could barely step. Then I was dragged out of the house and along the path toward the river.

"There seemed to be but two of my captors, but they made no sound, so that I could not discover who or what they were. One walked on either side of me with an arm locked in mine, and thus I was half carried down the rough slope. Somewhere before reaching the warehouses my captors turned off and followed a path along the margin of the river. For nearly an hour I was dragged along in this ignominious fashion, wishing with all my heart that I had my arms free and my knife out of its sheath for just a minute.

"Finally my captors threw me into a canoe, leaped in after me, and propelled the craft out into the river. In a few moments we bumped against an object lying some distance from the shore. Still in perfect silence I was lifted out and with much difficulty hoisted to the top of the thing. Then the heavy bag was pulled off and I could see my enemies. The moonlight streamed through the overhanging trees and revealed the malicious faces of the two Indians who had been our canoemen from Santarem.

"They had brought me out to a huge log in midstream, and I was lying in a great crotch at one end where a limb had broken off. Without a word the Indians bound me to the broken branch so that I could not move. The log was quite thirty yards long and so large round that the top of it seemed almost flat. It floated nearly eight feet out of the water.

"The Indians prepared to climb back into their canoe. 'Senor,' said the most villainous looking of the two, in the most awful broken English it had ever been my fortune to hear, 'senor, you pretty mooch die by'm'be, eh? De gre't Mother of de Waters want you, senor, but you get off so, eh? Now you mak' pretty mooch eat for him, eh? *Sabe?*'

"He followed his companion into the canoe, leaving me to study on his words, and the situation. I must say there were several things I *didn't* 'sabe.'

"Why I should have been selected for a fate like this I could not understand. I had not injured the Indians, to my knowledge, and it wasn't plunder they were after, for even the knife at my belt was untouched. By and

by the log began to move. It had probably been aground on a mud bank and by some means the Indians had set it afloat again.

"I shouted until I was hoarse, but to no avail. The great stick floated out into the current and moved at a sluggish pace down the great river. I began to try and compute the length of time it would take the tree to float as far as Santarem, and whether I could exist without food or water until then. There was little hope of being rescued before reaching that town.

"I struggled to get free until I felt as though every muscle in my body was wrenched. I did loosen my bonds some by these maneuvers, but my progress was so slow that a dozen times before daylight I almost lost hope of getting free. The moon went down and soon after the stars faded before the advancing daylight. The nights are short in the tropics. The sharp barking and chattering of the innumerable inhabitants of the forest welcomed the sun, and just as it appeared above the tree tops, I pulled one arm out from under me, and after a little exertion stripped the bonds from the other. It was then but the work of a few moments to unfasten my legs.

"The shore was more than half a mile away, and although the forest showed no break or opening along the bank, I gazed upon it longingly. There was at least food there, and I thought I had rather be lost in the trackless Selvas than be afloat on the bosom of the mighty river. I could swim, of course, but there was one very ugly objection to that. The river was infested with cayamans, their ugly snouts popping up all about the floating tree. Every mud bank was alive with them.

"After I got control of my legs enough to walk I examined my odd craft from 'stem to stern.' It was a mighty timber, probably having floated down from the headwaters of the river, where the trees grow very large. It may have been in the water for years, the floods driving it nearer and nearer the coast each season.

"Near where I had been bound by my captors was a hole in the tree larger than a man's body. Where a limb had broken off close to the trunk the wood had rotted out, probably leaving a good sized cavity in the heart of the tree. Around this hole the bark was worn off quite smoothly, and I made up my mind that before the tree had fallen into the river some animal had made its lair in this hollow. In fact, as I went nearer to it, a most unpleasant odor reached my nostrils.

"Something's dead and decaying in there," I thought, and peering in, I could just make out the outlines of some body lying perfectly still.

"Just then I glanced up to see a canoe approaching me from the bank of the river. At first I feared it was my friends, the Indians, returning; but in a moment I saw that there was but one occupant of the canoe. As it drew nearer I recognized Manuel Diaz, paddling for all he was worth, and my heart leaped for gratitude. In a few moments he was close alongside.

"Well, I never was more thankful to see mortal being in my life, and I told him so. But he only stared at me with frowning brow, and demanded how I had got free.

" 'Then you knew how those fiendish Indians triced me up here?' said I. 'How did you learn it?'

" 'Yes, I knew,' said he slowly. 'I came out to see that they haf done the job well, an' eet eez lucky I do, eh?' he added, his lips curling in a sardonic smile.

"For the first time I began to suspect that all was not right. 'What do you mean, Senor Diaz?' I asked faintly.

" 'I mean that it was by *my* orders you were tied there!' he hissed. 'And when I leave now, you shall stay tied.' He drove his canoe nearer, and prepared to leap upon the tree. I shrank away from him, but my hand sought the knife in my belt. For a moment I believed him to have gone mad; otherwise I could not explain his words.

"But when he spoke again I understood.

" 'You, senor, are in my power!' he exclaimed. 'Eet ees where I haf want you for mont's. *Carramba!* Think you that a Spanish gentleman will allow a dog of an *Americano* to come between him and his promised wife? Those cursed Indians did not their work well—but I shall—nefer fear!'

"He had already fastened his canoe, and now scrambled up the side of the trunk.

" 'Stop!' I shouted, drawing the knife from its sheath. 'Whether you are mad or not, I give you fair warning that you'll be injured if you approach me.'

"He laughed wildly, and before I could reach him, although I sprang forward to push him back, he was on his feet and had drawn a pistol from his pocket. I halted at once. I couldn't walk up to that with nothing but a knife, and he knew it.

" 'No, no, senor!' he cried with another fiendish laugh. 'I am not quite so mooch a child, eh? You will drop the knife, an' I will bind you—this time to make sure.'

" 'Would you leave me here to die?' I cried, in horror.

" 'Si, senor, that ees what I intended. You are in my power.'

"He stood at the extreme end of the log, and between us was the crotch where I had lain during the night, and the hole beside it. I glanced about with longing eyes; but there was nobody in sight. I dared not leap into the river and swim for the shore. The canoe was behind him, and I could not get to it. And then, there was the revolver in his hand; if he was any sort of a shot he could easily wing me in either case.

"He advanced, and I fell back toward my end of the log. 'Hold, senor!' he commanded. 'It does you no good to try to escape me.'

"As he spoke he was in the act of stepping over the hole in the log. Suddenly a great flat head shot up from beneath his very feet—a head marked with brilliant scales, and with a wide open, hissing mouth. Diaz uttered a shriek and leaped back as he saw the awful thing.

"But his heel caught in the edge of the hole and he fell flat upon the log. The great head at once darted up to the height of a man, waving sinuously to and fro, the blood red eyes blazing like coals. I stood with my knife clutched in my hand as though carved from stone. I understood now the fetid odor I had noticed about the cavity in the tree trunk, and the thought of my own peril fairly paralyzed me.

"Diaz tried to get upon his feet. The pistol was still in his hand and he pulled the trigger when the muzzle of the weapon was less than four feet from the boa's head; but somehow he missed.

"Like a flash the great head descended and the poor wretch was driven back upon the log with sufficient force to knock the breath from his body. The pistol flew from his grasp and fell into the water. Another awful burst from his lips and then the great serpent had its folds about him.

"There was a fierce struggle for a few seconds, and then the Mother of the Waters raised its ugly head and turned his baleful eyes on me. The body of Diaz lay in the center of the huge folds.

"My own imminent danger brought me to life and action. I flung my knife straight at the serpent and leaped sideways into the river. The swinging stroke of its head missed me by less than a foot.

"Before it could recover itself I had reached the canoe and scrambled aboard. In some manner I untied the rope, seized the paddle, and drove the light craft away. Not until I was many rods off did I look back.

"Then I saw fully twenty feet of the boa's length out of the cavity, its reddened head reared above a shapeless mass lying across the log. I turned away in horror that I might not see the last act."

Nelse took his feet off the veranda rail and threw the butt of his cigar into a *lantana* bush below.

"That's a nice story to tell you just before going to bed," said he, with a laugh and shrug of his shoulders. "You won't ask me for another right away. I never think of it if I can help myself, and Tharese never fully understood what became of her cousin.

"He was a murderous rascal. There's little doubt of that. Yet I wouldn't have wished anybody such an end. It isn't often that the plotter falls into his own trap so literally. He had paid those niggers to tie me to the log and set me afloat, knowing pretty well that there would be no escape from it. But he didn't suspect the presence of the water boa, or he'd never have ventured on the log. That was evidently known only to the Indians, and they considered my being left there at the mouth of the serpent's lair, a propitiation for any possible offense they might have given the Mother of the Waters on the way up from Santarem.

"The boa must have been torpid or I should not have stayed there close to its lair all night without attracting its notice. But our voices must have aroused it when Diaz came to gloat over my unhappy condition, and it was all ready for breakfast when the poor fellow jumped on the log.

"The affair ended well for me. I wrote the firm what had happened, took the Indians to Santarem for punishment, and ten months later was ordered back to Para to take the position left vacant by the Spaniard's death. And after a decent season, I made advances to Tharese and we were married."

Nelse took another cigar and thoughtfully bit off the point. "Well, Jacob served some time longer for Rachel than I did for Tharese, but I'll guarantee it wasn't half as exciting."

W. Bert Foster.

THE BUNKEL MYSTERY.*

How the robbery of the rival banks became a matter of strange coincidences—Far reaching and totally unexpected results of an act of gallantry—The battles on Bunkel Island, and the frustrating of carefully laid plans.

MR. SINGERLAY and Mr. Barkpool are the two wealthiest citizens of Montoban. The former is proprietor of the Montoban Mill, and president of the Montoban Bank; the latter owns the Onongo Mill, and presides over the Onongo Bank. They have long been enemies, and their quarrel is shared by their sons, Dolph Singerlay and Phin Barkpool, but both the latter are beset by the same desire: to have a steamer of his own on the lake. Andy Lamb is the son of Mr. Barkpool's engineer, and he rescues Diana Singerlay from the persecutions of Tom Sawder, a young hoodlum. Phin quarrels with him in consequence, and the father is dismissed from the Barkpool employ, only to be hired by Mr. Singerlay. Meantime Dolph and Phin, despairing of getting steamers from their fathers, rob the banks of which their fathers are the respective heads. They are surprised in their work by a professional burglar, and his assistant, Tom Sawder, who capture the two young gentlemen, together with a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and carry them off in a rowboat on Lake Montoban. On the way to their destination, Dolph informs their chief captor, who is called Poddy, that he has an offer to make him.

CHAPTER XX.—A CHAPTER OF COINCIDENCES.

AS soon as Tom Sawder was relieved from duty at the oars, he made his way to the bow of the boat, and stowed himself away in the fore-sheets. He did not seem to feel the slightest interest in the offer which Dolph had mentioned, and before he began to state it, the hoodlum was asleep.

Though they had never rowed in the same boat before, the sons of the magnates kept good time with their oars, and worked well together. The wind was not as strong as it had been the day before, and the lake was comparatively smooth, so that the boat doubled its speed at once.

"Don't flatter yourself that I shall accept any offer you may make, my dear young friend, for we are in the same boat only in the real, and not at all in the figurative sense," said Poddy, cheerfully but candidly.

"If it is for your own interest to accept it, you will do so, won't you?" asked Dolph.

"Certainly I will, but your interest and mine do not coincide," replied the robber. "You went into the bank at midnight for the purpose of getting the money there."

"Only a certain sum; and I had no more idea of taking all there was in the vault than I had of taking the building," protested Dolph.

"That was just what I intended to do; and I hadn't the least intention of cleaning out the vault," added Phin.

"That proves that our interests were not the same. You were not as willing to be hung for an old sheep as for a lamb."

**This story began in the April issue of THE ARGOSY. The three back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 30 cents.*

"I did not want to take any more from my father than I needed," said Dolph. "I was only going to borrow the money from the bank—not exactly as other people do, but I am sure it would have been paid back to the bank."

"Just my idea exactly," exclaimed Phin.

"Just my idea, too!" chuckled the robber. "I was only borrowing the money; and when I am worth a million, I shall be able and willing to pay it back. I am no worse than the cashiers who borrow of banks and other corporations."

"My father would have paid the three thousand I intended to take, and be sorry he did not let me have the money when I asked him for it," said Dolph.

"Mine, ditto!" exclaimed Phin.

"How much did you intend to borrow, Mr. Barkpool?" asked Poddy.

"Only three thousand."

"Then by a singular coincidence, you each wanted the same amount at exactly the same time, and you adopted precisely the same expedient to obtain it," said the robber, who was quite as gentlemanly as any of the officials who rob corporations, though he adopted a more vulgar method. "Probably you had talked the matter over between yourselves."

"I haven't spoken a word to Phin Barkpool for years," rejoined Dolph.

"Nor I to Dolph Singerlay," added Phin.

"I don't want to be inquisitive, Mr. Singerlay, but I should really like to know what you wished to do with the three thousand dollars," said Poddy, in a very insinuating manner.

"I have no objection to telling you now, for you won't be likely to mention it in Montoban; and I will keep Phin's secret if he will keep mine, for I take it you are going to put the same question to him."

"That was my intention."

"I will agree to keep still as long as Dolph does," said Phin.

"That's understood, and you agree very well for a couple of young gentlemen who have been at swords' points for years," laughed Poddy. "Now, Mr. Singerlay, what were you going to do with three thousand dollars if you had got it?"

"I was going to buy a steamer with it," Dolph answered very promptly.

"That is just what I was going to do!" exclaimed Phin.

"Another coincidence. Why, this seems to be a chapter of them," remarked Poddy. "Now, Mr. Singerlay, what steamer were you going to buy?"

"The Lily, which used to run on Lake Modogo."

"That is just the one I was after!" almost shouted Phin.

"Still another coincidence!" exclaimed the robber. "But you could not both buy the same steamer."

"I did not know that Dolph was after her," said Phin.

"Nor I that Phin wanted her," rejoined Dolph. "But you have not yet heard my offer, Mr. Poddy," he added.

"I will hear it before we reach the island; don't be in a hurry. This

chapter of coincidences is interesting. As you cannot both purchase the same steamer, you might buy her together, and own equal interests in her."

"My father will not agree to that," said Phin.

"Nor mine," added Dolph.

"But neither of your fathers would agree that his son should have a steamer at all. I cannot afford to give you three thousand dollars apiece out of my hard earnings, but I might be induced to hand over half of that sum to each of you; I don't promise it, mind, but I will consider it," said the chief robber, still chuckling as he spoke.

"I don't know about it; perhaps we might agree on something," replied Dolph.

"Think it over, and I will do the same," said Poddy, who seemed to be both interested and amused over the problem he had suggested. "I don't know but I ought to give both of you some share of the swag, though it must be small, for I am a poor man, and I can't afford to make a big sacrifice."

"A poor man!" exclaimed Dolph. "Why, you must have got nearly a hundred thousand dollars from the Montoban, for I heard the cashier tell my father how much he had on hand."

"And the Onongo contained over fifty thousand," said Phin.

"One hundred and fifty thousand! That's nothing but a mere bagatelle!" exclaimed Poddy. "Yes; I am a poor man."

"You would not miss the six thousand," said Dolph.

"Don't say anything about six; we will think of three. Perhaps I ought to do something for you both," continued Poddy. "When I went to the first bank I expected to have to drill holes in the doors, and work at least two hours before I made any money; but you were kind enough to open the doors, Mr. Dolph, and you saved me a great deal of trouble. Mr. Phin was so thoughtful as to do me the same favor at the second bank. You made a sure thing of it in both banks, and I am very grateful to you both for the service you have rendered."

"Then call it three thousand apiece," said Dolph boldly.

"I might not have had time enough before morning to do both jobs, and I owe you a million thanks."

"Pay in bank bills, if you please," laughed Dolph.

"Now your plan, Mr. Singerlay."

"Give me thirty five hundred, Mr. Poddy, and I will take the morning train for California. Then I shall be out of the way," said Dolph.

"I make the same offer," added Phin.

"But you have raised the figure, Mr. Dolph," replied Poddy.

"That five hundred is for traveling expenses."

"But neither of you will want a steamer if you go to California."

"We shall want her when we come back, and the whole thing has blown over," returned Dolph.

"We will discuss and consider the whole subject some time during the next three days," said Poddy, as he saw that the boat was very near the island.

"Three days!" ejaculated Dolph.

"Three days!" repeated Phin.

"We expect to remain on this island as long as that—perhaps longer," replied the robber carelessly, as though he had the events of the future under perfect control.

"Are we to stay on the island three days?" demanded Dolph, in his old tone, as though he expected to have a voice in the matter.

"Perhaps you will stay longer than that; and you may remain till the last trump sounds, if you don't obey orders to the letter and conduct yourselves with the utmost circumspection."

Poddy spoke in stern tones, as though he intended to remove any wrong impression the prisoners might have obtained from his light and jocular conversation.

The boat came up to the landing rock.

CHAPTER XXI.—PODDY'S IMPRESSIVE SERMON.

"WAKE up, Tom!" called Poddy, as the oarsmen brought the boat up to the flat rock which answered the purpose of a wharf.

The hoodlum did not move, for he was as insensible as the rocks on the shore. Phin, who was the nearest to him, shook him as though he had been a wet rag half a dozen times before he exhibited any signs of life. When he did wake, it took him some time to comprehend where he was, or that there was anything in the world worth living for.

"Stir yourself, Tom!" said the leader of the enterprise. "You will have three days to sleep after we get settled; attend to business now. Jump ashore, and take the painter with you."

"All right, Poddy," replied Tom, with a prodigious gape, as he slowly obeyed the order.

The chief stepped on shore with his traveling bag in his hand. Dolph looked at this bag, and he saw that it was very heavy, from the effort the bearer of it had to make in stepping out of the boat with it. It was of good size, and the prisoner knew that it contained the tools of its owner's villainous profession.

There was also an immense sum of money in it, which could not be very heavy, as it was all in bills. Dolph felt an interest in this bag, and especially in its contents. According to the last announcement of Poddy, they were to remain on the island at least three days, and things began to look very black to him.

He had kept up a lively hope that the chief would accept one of his offers; but when the gentlemanly villain changed his tone, he realized that he had simply been amusing himself at the expense of his prisoner. He might pretend to be grateful to them for opening the vaults, but his gratitude was not likely to materialize in any substantial manner.

When he came to look at the matter, apart from his own views and wishes, he saw that Poddy had no motive for conferring a favor of any kind upon his victims. He had plundered the vaults of both of the banks, and he had the

entire proceeds of the robbery in his possession. He was the master of the situation, and he had no need to make any concessions.

Dolph came to this conclusion almost in spite of himself ; but its logic was inexorable, and he could not resist the force of the evidence. There was nothing to hope for, and he could not do anything but wait for the movements of the robber. Tom Sawder was only a cipher in the enterprise, who had been admitted to do the drudgery.

Phin did some thinking on his own account, but he arrived at almost exactly the same result as his companion in captivity. He had expected to be released before this time, and the prospect of three days' confinement on the island was not pleasant to contemplate.

Dolph gave up all hope that his offers would be accepted ; and then he began to wonder how it would be possible for Poddy to remain three days on Bunkel Island without being discovered. Though Phin and himself had done most of the sailing on the lake, Di had a boat, and she would be likely to come near enough to see that the spot was occupied.

But Poddy evidently had his plan all arranged before he visited the banks, and he seemed to have the utmost confidence in the security of his situation. Dolph could not make anything of the matter, and he resigned himself as well as he could to the necessity of waiting for further developments.

Tom Sawder continued to gape, and to do it out loud. For him the excitement was over, and it was hard work for him to keep on his feet. He fastened the painter to a rock, which had been placed in position for this purpose, and then joined his leader.

"Now, gentlemen, if you will step on shore, we will take the boat out of the water," said the chief.

"You do it like the fellow that locked the door and put the keyhole in his pocket," said Phin, as he assisted in lifting the boat upon the flat rock.

"That is just the way we do it," replied Poddy. "If we left the boat in the water, some wretch without the fear of the law before his eyes might come here and steal it. It is wicked to steal, and I should feel guilty if I exposed any person to the temptation of committing such a crime."

"Pity about you !" commented Dolph.

"I don't often sermonize, but I find it necessary to do a little of it on the present occasion," continued the chief, as he opened the slide of his dark lantern. "I wish to impress upon your minds, my dear friends, the necessity of being strong in the presence of temptation.

"We are going to reside on this beautiful island for a longer or a shorter time, whose limit I am at this moment unable to fix. You may be tempted to resist the wishes of your friend, who concerns himself deeply for your comfort, and especially for your safety ; of course, I mean myself.

"Now if you are tempted, either or both of you, to rebel against this friend, I counsel you in the most affectionate manner to resist the temptation. Put it behind you with all your might. It will lead you into a perilous snare if you yield to it.

"Besides, a friend should never lead a friend into temptation. If he does, he shares his guilt in a measure. You see that I am a very strict

moralist. If you should yield to temptation, you would lead me into error, and perhaps crime ; for if you attempt to run away, I shall shoot you."

At this last remark, Poddy brought a revolver into the strong light of his lantern so that both of the prisoners could see it plainly.

"One of the balls from this toy might go through your head or your heart ; and if it did, it would be likely to leave one of the quarrelsome potentes of Montoban without a male heir ; or both of them, if the amount of resistance required such a fearful sacrifice.

"But I do not wish to shoot either or both of you. It would be a very disagreeable, I may say a very painful, duty for me to discharge. As you love me, do not compel me to do such a thing. Spare me this lacerating grief, I beg of you."

"I don't think that we shall do anything which will lead you to distress yourself in the manner you suggest," replied Dolph.

"I am glad you take this happy view of the situation, my dear young friend," said Poddy.

"I don't want to stand here all night," growled Tom, who could not appreciate the remarks of his fellow sinner. "I shall split my head open again if you keep this racket up much longer."

"Be patient, Thomas, and all things will be accomplished. Now, we will carry the boat to a safer place, where our dear friends will not be tempted to use it for forbidden purposes," continued Poddy, as he raised one end of the light craft.

Tom took hold of the other end, and without any request to do so, Dolph and Phin assisted at the sides. They carried the boat to the rocks on the east side of the island, where the surface was exceedingly rough and uneven. An earthquake could not have produced greater confusion in the topography of the place.

The eastern shore of the lake, abreast of the island, was called Castle Hills, and the winding stream which flowed into Pink Lake leaped in several places from lofty steepes. The scenery on the west side of Bunkel Island was of the same character.

The rocks were almost covered with a growth of savins and firs where there was soil enough to give them a hold. The party halted at a thick clump of these stunted trees, on a little plateau about thirty feet above the surface of the lake.

The curiosity of the prisoners was greatly excited, for they could not imagine where they were to be conducted. They thought they knew every foot of the island, and they could not even imagine any place of concealment. Tom removed several firs which had been placed against a steep rock, and they saw what looked like an opening.

CHAPTER XXII.—THE GROTTO ON BUNKEL ISLAND.

"THERE is a cave in there !" exclaimed Dolph, as soon as he discovered the opening which the movements of Tom Sawder had revealed. "Did you know there was a cave on Bunkel Island, Phin?"

"I hadn't the least idea of it," replied Barkpool. "I know of three of them in Castle Hills; but I never heard of one on this island before."

This was the first time that either of these accomplished young gentlemen had spoken to the other for two years, though they had been schoolmates most of the time. Each had avoided the other on principle, as it were, rather than because there was any real enmity between them. Certainly Dolph, who had been the first to speak, was not inclined to quarrel with his fellow prisoner under present circumstances.

"Bear a hand now, Mr. Barkpool," said Poddy, when Tom had removed the trees from the front of the opening. "If this boat is the keyhole, we will pocket it in this hole in the rocks."

Tom was sent into the grotto, as it afterwards came to be called, and raised the end of the boat, while the others lifted and pushed the light structure into the opening. Then the keel was dropped on a line of boards, and the boat was slid to its resting place in the underground apartment.

The grotto was not more than four feet high in the loftiest place. It was about twenty feet deep and from three to eight feet wide. The rocks were nearly as irregular as they were on the outside, and there was not much space to spare when the boat and the party were in it.

A part of the bottom was of earth and a part of solid rock. Over a portion of it boards were laid down and leveled up with stones. This arrangement gave the occupants a dry floor, and the place did not look at all uncomfortable.

On one side a raised platform had been made with boards, covered with fine twigs, on which was a supply of blankets. This was the bed of the party. There were a few cooking utensils and many articles of comfort to a camping out party.

"I welcome you to your new dwelling place," said Poddy, as soon as the prisoners had taken a look at the interior of the grotto. "I hope you will be happy and grow in wisdom and grace during your residence here."

"Since we cannot help ourselves, we might as well try to be happy," replied Dolph.

"When I was a boy, and used to read stories about pirates and smugglers, I thought a cave was the nicest place in the world to live in," said Poddy, as he lighted a lantern which hung from a pole thrust into a crevice in the rocks.

"I think I like my room in my father's house better than this place," added Dolph, as he continued his examination of his surroundings.

"I am willing to confess that I prefer a room in a first class hotel to any cave I ever visited. But circumstances alter cases, and in the pursuit of my difficult and dangerous occupation, I am obliged to sacrifice comfort to business considerations."

"And shall we have to live in this hole for three days?" asked Phin, who had already made up his mind that he did not like cave life, though his imagination had been stimulated in that direction by some of his reading.

"Three days, three weeks, or three months; not longer than the term

last named ; but it all depends on circumstances, of which I am a creature," replied the robber. "'Blessed be the man that invented sleep,' said Sancho Panza; and that is just what Tom is saying to himself at this moment."

Tom Sawder had stretched himself on the platform as soon as the boat was in position, and by this time he was snoring like a young elephant with the nightmare. The chief himself was gaping with long stretches, and the eyes of the prisoners were heavy.

Poddy took out the thwarts of the boat, and spread a couple of blankets in the bottom of it.

"I am sorry that I cannot offer to our distinguished guests any better bed than the bottom of this boat, but it is the best at my command," said Poddy.

"It will do very well," replied Dolph.

"Tomorrow you can gather twigs to make your couch a little softer ; but we can't do any better tonight. Pope speaks of sermons in stones, and I might introduce a sermon in rocks ; but I won't, and you must recall the discourse I gave you at the landing. I must remind you that if you get out of the cave, you can't get away from the island without a boat. A word to the wise is as good as an oration to a dead horse," said Poddy, as he left the prisoners, and lay down on the platform, foot to foot with Tom.

Dolph and Phin were tired enough to sleep, for it had been a long day to both of them. Dolph had done more hard work within the last eighteen hours than he had ever done before in his life ; yet though he was sleepy, he was not inclined to sleep.

Dolph was the more enterprising of the two prisoners, and he was not ready to believe that he should stay in the cave, or on the island, three weeks, or even three days. He wanted to consider some plan to get out of the scrape. He tried to think of some way to get ahead of the cool and good natured bank robber ; but he realized that he would be a tiger in the face of any opposition.

Poddy had promised to shoot the prisoners, or either of them, if any attempt to escape was made. Dolph had not the least doubt that he would keep his word to the letter. Such a catastrophe was not pleasant to think of ; but the revolver he had seen two or three times might be made to change hands, and the boot shifted from one leg to the other.

Dolph thought at last that he could not hit upon any plan of action until he had seen more of the surroundings, and especially till he had ascertained where the robber kept the pistols after they were settled down to cave life. While he was thinking of it, he dropped asleep.

Phin canvassed the subject a little, though his thought took a different direction. The robbery of the banks would be discovered in the morning, and both Dolph and himself would be missed at home. A search would certainly be made, and his hope was that the police and others would find the cave. This was as far as he got when he was overtaken by slumber.

All was silent in the cave, except the sonorous breathings of Tom Sawder, which degenerated into snoring some of the time. Poddy slept as quietly as though he was resting from the fatigues of an honest day's work. The

slumbers of the two prisoners were as profound as though they had been in their downy beds within the palatial walls of their elegant homes.

Darkness covered the lake and the island, and hour after hour passed off into the eternity of the buried past. Not a light was to be seen in the town three miles distant, nor in any farm house on the shore, if there had been any one on Bunkel to see it. The daylight came in the east in a few hours, and the sun rose in all his glory, clear and bright.

Events were transpiring in Montoban, and especially in the homes of the two absent boys; but the occupants of the cave slept still. Poddy was the first to wake. He looked at his watch.

"Nine o'clock!" shouted he, as he sprang from his bed, and shook Tom till he brought him to life again.

Dolph and Phin left the boat at the same time. Then they discovered that the grotto was lighted by some opening at the end opposite the entrance.

"Good morning, young gentlemen," said Poddy, as he politely bowed to them. "We shall have breakfast in half an hour; and till that time you can take a walk on the island, if you wish."

"Thank you, sir," replied both of them.

They left the cave when Tom had removed the trees, and returned at the time indicated. Poddy was at work over a fire at the farther end of the cave; but it did not burn well, and the coffee was not ready till half past ten.

While they were at the meal, seated on the platform which served as a bed, Poddy suddenly commanded silence. They obeyed, and then they heard the sound of voices.

CHAPTER XXIII.—THINGS LOOK STRANGE TO MR. ROBLOCK.

MONTOBAN slept as soundly as the weary occupants of the grotto of Bunkel Island. The slumbers of the magnates were as deep as those of the rest of the inhabitants, and the fact that the two dams had been destroyed did not keep them awake. Neither of the presidents and neither of the cashiers of the two banks had any suspicion that the vaults containing their treasures had been visited during the night.

At an early hour of the morning the milkmen went their rounds, the carriers distributed the morning paper, and everything went on as usual in the town. The smoke was pouring out of the tall chimney on the engine house of the lower mill; at seven o'clock the work people went to their usual places and the machinery was started at the appointed time.

Hundreds of early risers went to the river to see by the light of day the havoc made by the waters the evening before. At the upper dam, the employees had nothing to do but to look at the ruins of the dam and watch the stream in its new channels. The folly of the Onongo magnate had subjected them to an enforced idleness that might last a day or a week.

Mr. Barkpool slept like a log as long as the fumes of the whisky he had drunk stupefied him. It was daylight when they left him, and he woke with a dry throat and an unsteady head. He drank a great deal of cold water from the ice pitcher, and then went out to see the wreck of the dam. The

sight made him angry, not so much because he was subjected to the expense of rebuilding it, as because his mill could not be started that day.

With the new engineer he had engaged, Mr. Singerlay was ahead of him, and would turn out his usual supply of goods while the Onongo was idle. The magnate went into the house, and his nerves were shaken. He drank whisky again, and it inspired him with an artificial energy. At sunrise his groom was driving him to the railway station, five miles away, to go in search of an engineer.

Mr. Singerlay left his bed at the usual time and looked over the local newspaper. There was nothing in it about the banks, though the battle with the hoodlums at the island was mentioned. When he had learned the news of the morning, he ate his breakfast, and then went to the mill, which he found at work as though nothing had happened.

If he missed Dolph at the table, he did not mention the fact, or inquire about him, for the young gentleman was often absent from meals. Mr. Roblock, the cashier, read the newspaper at the bank even before he did anything else; but he found nothing to astonish him in its columns.

Then he looked over the few letters he had obtained at the post office on the way. As soon as he heard the church clock strike nine, he unlocked the outer door of the vault. Just then Mr. Gayberry, the man who kept the store under the bank, came in with a check he had received for goods.

Mr. Roblock opened the inner door of the vault, and as it was rather dark inside, he took the drawer which contained the money—or had contained it—and went out into the banking room. He was talking all the time about the blowing up of the upper dam, and looking at the visitor, so that he did not see the interior of the drawer. He even slipped it into its place under the counter without noticing it, while he enlarged upon the wickedness of the person who had done the mischief.

"I should say that Barkpool will offer a large reward for the conviction of the scoundrel who did it," suggested Mr. Gayberry.

"Very likely he will, for the loss of the dams is not half the damage which has been done," added Mr. Roblock, as he picked up the check the storekeeper had thrown upon the counter. "Hundreds of poor people at the upper village are deprived of work by this deed, though the lower mill has gone to work as usual."

"I am in a little a hurry, for I am going to take the stage to Bushrod this forenoon, where I have to pay a bill," said Mr. Gayberry, looking at his watch.

Mr. Roblock pulled out the drawer which he had just shoved into its place, though with his eyes on the check.

"Sixty odd dollars; will you take three twenties?" asked the cashier. "Small bills are rather scarce."

So were large bills, he might have added, as he looked into the drawer he had mechanically pulled out.

"Large or small; it makes no difference to me," replied the customer.

Just then Mr. Roblock started back as though a discharge of electricity had been suddenly poured into his frame. He looked into the drawer, the

tills of which he had left full of bank notes the evening before. His gaze was riveted upon the appalling emptiness that confronted him.

He drew a long breath, and then he did not seem to be capable of drawing another. His under jaw dropped down and his face was as pale as though he had fainted. He did not fall upon the floor, but he staggered back to a chair and dropped into it.

"What is the matter, Mr. Roblock?" asked the storekeeper, as he observed the ashy face and the limp movements of the cashier.

Mr. Roblock looked at him; and there was nothing but the forebodings of ruin and despair in his gaze. Then he began to shake as though he had been struck with palsy.

"What is the matter? Are you sick? Do you feel faint?" demanded Mr. Gayberry, as he went to the door which led to the space behind the counter.

It was fastened on the inside, and he could not open it. He thought the cashier was going to drop on the floor in a faint or a fit of apoplexy, and with a little effort he pushed the door in, taking the screws out of the wood. The sufferer rose as he did so.

"No; I am not sick, Mr. Gayberry," said he, as he went to the counter. "The bank has been robbed since I left it at eight o'clock last evening!"

"Robbed!" exclaimed the storekeeper.

"Look into this drawer," added the cashier, as he pointed to the inside of it. "Every one of those tills was full of bills last night. Now there is not a bill in any one of them!"

"But there must be some mistake, Mr. Roblock; you have brought out the wrong drawer."

"There is but one drawer in the bank like that one."

"Look in the vault again."

The cashier lighted a lamp, and did so; but there was not a dollar to be found in the safe. He was in utter despair, for in his excitement he concluded that the affair would ruin him forever in this world. He even remembered what the president had said to him about doing his work in the daytime.

"How did you find the doors when you opened the vault?" asked Mr. Gayberry, who had no occasion to lose his head, though he owned the building.

"Just as I always find them. I had no suspicion that the bank had been robbed until I was going to take the bills from the till to pay your check," replied Mr. Roblock, as he dropped, utterly wilted, into his chair again.

"But if any one robbed the bank, he must have broken into the vault," said the customer.

"It would seem so," answered Mr. Roblock. "I opened the doors just as I always do, and there was nothing out of the way with them."

"Perhaps you left them unlocked," suggested Mr. Gayberry.

"If I had I should have discovered the fact when I turned the keys: The bank was locked at every point, as it always is."

"Then I don't understand it. If you had found the lock blown up, it would have been a plain case. You had the keys, and no one could have

unlocked the door without them," continued the storekeeper, as much puzzled as the cashier.

"I used the duplicate keys this morning to open the vault," said Mr. Roblock.

"Duplicate keys!" exclaimed Mr. Gayberry, sure that the explanation was now at hand.

"Last night Pullerton, of the Onongo, called upon me and said that he had just carried his duplicate keys to Mr. Barkpool, so that both sets should not be destroyed in case of fire. Mr. Singerlay compels me to carry the keys I use every night to his house, though he knows that I have a duplicate set. Neither he nor I had ever thought of the absurdity of doing so while there was another set in existence. I intended this afternoon to call his attention to the fact, and I brought the duplicates, which had been locked up in my desk at home since the bank was started, with me. As I had them, I thought I would open the bank with them, so that the president could see just how the matter stood."

"Then Mr. Singerlay has the other set of keys," added the storekeeper.

"Of course he has; I carried them to him last evening. I wish I had taken some other time to point out the absurdity of the way in which we were acting," replied the cashier bitterly. "Now I shall be charged with robbing the bank. I am tempted to start for Canada, but I have not money enough to pay my fare."

"Don't do that," said Mr. Gayberry, as he passed into the rear room. "Here is where the robbers entered."

They examined the break which Poddy had made. The cashier could not see why the robber had done that if he had the keys. They decided to wait upon the president at once, and Mr. Gayberry called up one of his clerks to stay in the bank after the vault had been locked.

CHAPTER XXIV.—A SHOCK TO THE HOUSE OF SINGERLAY.

MR. SINGERLAY was not in the house when the despairing cashier and the storekeeper were admitted. He had gone to the mill, but his wife volunteered to send for him, for the bank official did not care to meet him in the presence of any of the operatives.

In a few minutes the magnate appeared. Mr. Roblock was in a tremulous condition, and the storekeeper counseled him to brace up and be a man. The sufferer had been disposed to rebel at the overbearing manner of the president, and it suddenly flashed upon his mind that he had nothing more to hope for from the great mau. Guilty or innocent, he was sure to be condemned.

The thought inspired him with the resolution to stand up for his own innocence, and he decided not to submit to any considerable amount of brow-beating. He had done his duty faithfully, and this reflection did more to strengthen his wavering mind than anything else. He was determined to behave like a man, as his companion advised him to do. A great change suddenly came over him.

"Now I think of it, you did not come for the keys this morning, Mr. Roblock," said the magnate, as soon as he saw the cashier. "Am I to understand that the bank is not open at half past nine in the forenoon?" And a heavy frown brooded on his brow.

"I opened the bank at the usual time, sir, using the duplicate keys in my possession, for I intended to hand them over to you," replied the cashier, with more decision in his tones than he had ever assumed before to the mighty president.

"What duplicate keys?" demanded the latter.

"The duplicate keys you gave me with the others when the bank was organized. I locked them up in my desk, and had forgotten all about them till a circumstance last night reminded me of them. You gave them to me, sir, at the time," said Mr. Roblock.

"And while you have been bringing the keys to me every night for the last year, you have had another set in your possession?" exclaimed Mr. Singerlay, with a magnificent sneer.

"I have, sir, and you gave them to me."

"Then you have been subjecting me to this child's play for a twelve-month!"

"I have obeyed your orders, Mr. Singerlay."

"Why didn't you tell me there was another set of keys?"

"Since you gave me the keys, both sets of them, you were as well aware of the fact of their existence as I was, sir."

"I told you to bring the keys to my house every night; I did not mean half of them, but the whole of them!" replied the president, beginning to boil over with anger, as the cashier got the better of him in the argument.

"I have been doing it for a year, and you never mentioned the other keys or told me you wanted them. But it makes no difference now."

"Doesn't it, indeed! It seems, too, that you have closed the bank, and come up here!" foamed the magnate.

"There is nothing left there to steal," answered Mr. Roblock, desperately, and perhaps consoled with the idea that the president would now have something to rave over.

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Singerlay, impressed by the manner of the cashier more than by his independent speeches.

"I mean that the bank was robbed last night of every dollar in the vault," said Mr. Roblock.

"Robbed!"

"Not a dollar left in the tills."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the magnate, as he settled down into an arm chair; and for once in his life, at least, he was completely overcome.

"That is what I should have said if I had not seen for myself," added Mr. Roblock, who was surprised to find that he had plenty of self-possession, for the first time in his life, in the presence of the president.

Mr. Singerlay was completely upset. All his ready money was in the Montoban Bank, and at least nine tenths of the amount stolen belonged to him. Though it was only a fraction of his property, he could not even pay

off his operatives without borrowing. His loss would be hard upon him, and it was by all odds the heaviest blow ever given to his finances.

He felt like a man who had been struck down, humbled and humiliated. What a sweet morsel Barkpool would have to turn on his bitter tongue! His anger evaporated as quickly as it had condensed into wrath. Possibly he looked upon the poor cashier as a fellow mortal at that moment, and he might not have despised him for presuming to live upon the same earth with him.

"How did this happen, Mr. Roblock?" asked he, his tone and manner entirely changed.

"The robbers, if there was more than one of them, got in through a window in the back of the building;" and he narrated all the facts connected with the disappearance of the funds.

"It is plain enough that the robbers had another set of keys," said Mr. Gayberry, when the story was told.

"I did not call for the keys this morning, and of course they are still here," suggested the cashier.

"I sent Dolph up to my chamber with them," added the president, as he left the room to search for them.

"We shall soon get at the facts," said Mr. Gayberry.

The magnate was gone some time, and he came back without the keys.

"I keep them on a little table at the head of my bed, and I generally bring them down when I come to breakfast. I don't find them on the table, and I am sure I did not bring them down this morning," said the president, looking very much troubled. "Dorcas!"

This call was to his wife, who was in the next room. She came into the office at once, for it connected with the library.

"Where is Dolph, Dorcas?" he asked; and the lady could not help seeing that something extraordinary had happened. "I have not seen him this morning."

"Neither have I," she replied.

Mrs. Singerlay caused inquiries to be made at once, the result of which was that no one had seen Dolph that morning. In addition to this fact, the sweeper had found the outer side door unlocked. The family searched everywhere for the bank keys, but with no success.

Then it came to Mr. Singerlay's mind, like an unwelcome nightmare, that his son had threatened to obtain the money he refused to give him in some other manner. Was the robbery of the bank the explanation of his meaning? But the magnate said nothing. He dismissed his visitors with a promise to be at the bank in a few minutes.

Then he told the mother of the wayward boy what had occurred in the night, and from the facts drew the conclusion that Dolph had robbed the bank, and was at that moment in possession of nearly one hundred thousand dollars. The lady was the boy's mother, and she wept as though her heart would break.

"I knew that something must be done with Dolph, and I said so; but we have put it off too long," added Mr. Singerlay, in a subdued tone.

"Where is the poor boy now?" sobbed the afflicted mother. "He can't have gone a great way yet. Have him brought back, Percival."

"We must find him first; and I shall have to put the officers on his track," added the father sadly.

"Officers!"

"There is no other way. With so much money he may take the next steamer for Europe; and I must telegraph to New York City for the police to stop him."

The poor mother had nearly fainted, and her husband called Di, who was soon weeping over her brother. Mr. Singerlay went to the bank. He sent for the policemen, and he telegraphed to several points. One of the officers soon appeared.

"I want all three of you," said the president, when the man presented himself.

"The other men are busy at the Onongo Bank," replied the officer, whose name was Leffwing.

"What are they doing there?" asked the magnate impatiently.

"The Onongo has been robbed of all the money there was in it. Marmion and Rynon are at work on the case," answered Leffwing.

"The Onongo also!" exclaimed Mr. Singerlay in amazement.

CHAPTER XXV.—ONE FACT AND PLenty OF THEORIES.

STRANGE as it may seem, Mr. Singerlay manifested no satisfaction when he learned that the Onongo Bank had been as thoroughly cleaned out as the Montoban. If there was anything of gladness or triumph in his heart, he concealed it so effectually that no one could see it.

"It seems very strange that both banks should have been robbed in the same night," said Mr. Singerlay, when Leffwing had stated the fact. "Is there any clue to the robbers?"

"Not the slightest, sir. Not a bit of wood or glass is broken, and it looks as though the men that did it had the keys of the doors and the vault," replied the officer.

"What does the cashier say about it?"

"He says he carried a set of duplicate keys to Mr. Barkpool's house last night, and he opened the bank and the vault this morning with his own keys."

"Then the robbers had the keys of both banks?"

"It looks so. Rynon has gone to Mr. Barkpool's house with Mr. Pullerton, to ascertain if the duplicate keys are still there. They will be back soon."

Leffwing examined the premises at the Montoban Bank. It looked as though the window in the rear room had been opened with a jimmy; and this was all the opinion he was able to give. The vault and the floor was searched very carefully, but there was not a thing of any kind found which could be used as a clue to the robbers.

Nothing had been disturbed at the Onongo except the money in the vault.

There was not a break of any kind ; and if both of the cashiers had not been at their posts, the two robberies would have been charged to them.

By this time it was noised through the town that both of the banks had been robbed, and a crowd had gathered at each of them. The cashier was busy answering questions at the Montoban, and there were all sorts of opinions advanced.

Mr. Singerlay went to the Onongo ; it was the first time he had ever put his foot inside of the building ; but he was excited, and he was anxious to learn the particulars in regard to the other bank, for he was painfully certain in regard to the details of his own loss.

Mr. Pullerton and the officer returned from the residence of Mr. Barkpool soon after he entered the banking room of the Onongo. Although he was not on speaking terms with the cashier, that official invited him behind the counter, from which the crowd were excluded.

The double robbery seemed to bring the rival houses together.

"Mr. Barkpool was driven to the station at a very early hour this morning, and had gone to the East to obtain an engineer for his mill," said Mr. Pullerton. "He does not yet know of the robbery, therefore."

"But you ought to telegraph to him on the train, or he will not hear of it till he sees it in the papers," suggested Mr. Singerlay.

"Mrs. Barkpool is coming to the bank soon, and she will attend to that," added the cashier.

"Did you find the duplicate keys?"

"I did not ; Mrs. Barkpool had seen her husband put them away, but they were not where he had placed them," answered the cashier. "But the strangest thing about the whole of it is that Phineas, Mr. Barkpool's son, is missing."

"His son missing !" exclaimed Mr. Singerlay. "Can it be possible?"

"His mother and sister had not seen him this morning ; and when they made inquiries for him, no one had seen him."

"Can it be that he and Dolph are together in this miserable business?" said Mr. Singerlay.

"We have no doubt now that Phin used the keys, and robbed this bank of its funds," added the cashier. "Mrs. Barkpool thinks so also, and she is in the greatest distress."

While they were talking about it this lady arrived at the bank. The crowd opened for her, and she passed in behind the counter.

She started back when she saw Mr. Singerlay. But misery makes companions of fair weather enemies, and he spoke to her as though there had been no break in their intimacy of former years.

He advised her what to do, and assured her that their interests were identical in the present unhappy circumstances. She directed the cashier to telegraph to her husband on the train ; and this was really all that could be done.

The magnate used the wire again to inform the New York officials that there were two boys of sixteen instead of one, and that the two banks had lost altogether one hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

The officers searched the town, and listened to every story that was brought to them. The citizens had plenty of theories, but they brought no facts to bear on the subject. Everybody was satisfied that Dolph and Phin were the robbers; no one expressed a doubt on the point.

In what manner had they left Montoban? Which way had they gone? Not a boat was missing on the lake, not a horse from any stable; and there was no train within five miles on the south, and twelve on the north. But they had gone by some route, and Officer Marmon was sent to the nearest station to make inquiries.

Rynon was an officer who understood boating, and he was appointed to make the search on the lake, though it seemed to be useless, since no boat was missing. He went first to the boat house of Mr. Singerlay. He looked the Dragon over.

While he was doing so, Andy Lamb came out of the mill, where he had been to tell his father the news of the robbery of the two banks. He related to him all the particulars that had come out.

Andy had an idea; and he was the first one who had been delivered of anything that could be called an idea. He had told his father about the man he had seen on Bunkel Island, and he brought it all up again. His father directed him to tell the officers all about it.

When he came out of the mill, he saw Rynon at the boat house, and he joined him. He told his story.

"What has the man to do with the matter?" demanded Rynon, who was disposed to treat with contempt the information Andy brought him. "It is just as certain as anything can be that Dolph and Phin robbed the banks."

"And it may be that neither of them had anything to do with the robbery," added Andy. "Nothing has been proved."

"Nothing proved!" exclaimed Rynon, with a sneer at the lack of intelligence on the part of Andy. "If you see a fish, don't you know that he came out of the water? If you find a fellow wet, don't you know that he has been in the water? Both banks have been robbed; the keys were at their houses; both boys are gone; both sets of keys are gone. What more do you want?"

"Tom Sawder has disappeared also," suggested Andy.

"He has nothing to do with this robbery. I know all about him, for I was at Bunkel last night looking for him. I saw your man; he was in the boat with the four vagabonds. He landed three of them, and I arrested them. When I went to look for Tom and the man, I could not find them."

"Where did they go?" asked Andy.

"That is more than I know. I looked all around the island, and couldn't find any sign either of them or the boat."

Mr. Singerlay came to the boat house for any news that he might learn, and Andy told him what he had seen at the island. He insisted that the place should be visited; and Rynon reluctantly yielded.

It was their voices that were heard in the grotto.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Oliver Optic.

HOODOO SAM.

The story of a mysterious disappearance intertwined with the case of an objectionable lover
—Tragic consequences of that lover's efforts to straighten the tangle,
and the revelations made thereby.

HETTY DARKE was making banana pies in the little shed kitchen of her cabin home. It was a midwinter day; but the mocking bird sang in the lemon tree by the window, and the scent of yellow jessamine came in on the breeze.

For this was in Florida—down on the eastern side of the peninsula, near the wonderful Indian River, which is no river at all, but a sound, shut from the Atlantic by long, narrow islands, fringed with mangroves and palm trees.

Hetty's lashes were wet, and there was a pathetic droop to her pretty mouth. Her hands moved mechanically at their task. All at once, they stopped. She had suddenly thought about her little brother.

She stepped to the window, and called "Rob, Rob!" There was no reply. She called again in a louder key. The mocking bird ceased to sing, as if to catch the answer; but no answer came.

Hetty laid down the knife and went out of doors. "Rob," she called sharply, "where are you?"

The stillness that followed was disturbed only by the moan of a dove in the bushy top of a pine tree. Hetty's face took on an expression of anxiety and remorse. What if some harm had come to the little brother she had sent away an hour ago, neglecting to charge him not to go into the woods, where rattlesnakes lurked under the palmettoes and wire grass, and on no account to go near the Sink. She had forgotten this, her usual warning, in her haste to get him out of the kitchen before Hardy Brock—whom she saw approaching through the orange trees—should come and make a last appeal to her to go away with him.

She had kept a lookout for her lover. She was sure he would come when he discovered that her father and brothers, who had forbidden him to enter the house, had gone at daybreak to hunt wild turkeys. There was no harm, she told herself, in seeing him this once. It would be the last time. He was going away—so far away—to California. It was not right for her father and two tall brothers to hate him and forbid her to marry him because of an old quarrel.

Yes, she would see him once more and part from him kindly. He was dreadfully hurt because she would not go with him. But how could she leave her father, who had no one else to keep house for him? Above all, how could she desert Rob, the child her dying mother had left to her care?

The interview between the lovers was short. Brock went away angry

and sullen. "If you loved me you would come with me," he said; and she answered, as she had many times before, "I can never leave Rob."

"That brat!" he exclaimed passionately. "I count for nothing with you alongside of him. I wish he was dead."

"Shame on you to say such a thing! I will never speak to you again, Hardy Brock," flashed Hetty, turning sharply from the window, on the sill of which her sweetheart leaned.

When she looked toward the window again, he was gone.

She sat down and had a hard cry; then she bathed her face and went back to pie making—one's work must go on, no matter how one's heart is aching.

Nearly an hour had passed since she had put a hot cake in Rob's chubby fist and sent him away to play.

At first, she was scarcely uneasy. He was asleep somewhere, she thought, or mischievously hiding from her. But when she failed to find him after running here and there about the cleared ground, looking behind the hen house and the banks of sweet potatoes, her misgivings increased and the tones in which she repeated his name had a quaver of keen anxiety.

"The Sink," she thought presently. "He may have gone to the Sink. Yes, his fishing rod is missing; he is there!"

The Sink was a mile from the house. It was a funnel shaped hole half filled with the black waters of a lagoon which made out from the San Lucia River. The lagoon sank into the earth through this sink, the bottom of which had never been found. Such sinks abound in Florida, underlaid as the peninsula is with the porous concrete of shells called "rotten limestone." In some of the sinks, the water rises and falls at regular intervals, showing subterranean connection with the ocean.

Hetty ran all the way to the Sink, looking right and left through the open pine woods, and occasionally sending her cry of "Rob!" across the level waste of scrub palmetto and wire grass. The loose sand of the path could hold no print of the little bare feet. She saw no trace of the child, until she reached the Sink. There, on the bank under an overhanging live oak, was his fishing rod; near it lay a small catfish, its tail still feebly flapping.

But Rob was nowhere to be seen.

Hetty rushed to the edge of the steep bank and looked down into the Sink. The black waters were motionless; the dead leaves floating on it did not stir. But, as she looked, the waters suddenly became disturbed, the dead leaves whirled around an instant, bubbles rose and burst, and from the black depths came the gurgling sound which had helped to put the ban of "haunted" on the Sink.

"It is the Bad One laughing to himself," the superstitious said.

The "Bad One," who had his habitation in this gloomy hole, was supposed to hold the shape of a huge alligator, so old and tough that his moss grown hide was bullet proof. He had often been seen and shot at, but he still lived; calves and pigs that had disappeared were believed to have been devoured by him in his inaccessible den—a great hole in the bank below the water.

Pigs and calves had not been the only prey of the alligator demon. A deeper horror had attached to the Sink, since one day two years before, when a child had disappeared, after having been last seen playing on the bank of the lagoon above the Sink. The lagoon had been thoroughly dragged, but the body had never been found. The alligator leaves no bones after his feast.

Was this the fate of little Rob? The thought overcame Hetty with horror. She cowered back from the edge of the Sink and crouched on the bank, trembling. In another moment she had got upon her feet and was running along the path toward the house. There was still a hope. Rob might have come while she was away.

When she was almost at the gate she met her father and brother returning from the hunt, Nathan, the elder, carrying, as his trophy, a great turkey gobbler that hung by its legs from a stick slung across his shoulders.

"Why, sis, what's the matter?" he exclaimed.

She had stopped before them, white and breathless.

"Rob," she gasped. "I can't find him; his fishing rod's at the Sink—maybe he's come home though."

"No, he ain't," spoke up a tramp boy, who had been hired to pick beans in a neighbor's patch. "I've jest come from the house an' Rob ain't there. Las' time I seen him he was goin' to'ards the Sink; that wus whilst Hardy wus talkin' to you at the winder."

"Hardy Brock at this house—talkin' to Hetty?"

"Yes," went on the boy, delighted at causing a sensation. "An' when I went 'long by the winder I heard him say he wish't Rob wus dead, so as Hetty could go off with him to Californy."

"Then he's made way with Rob—the scoundrel!"

"No, no!" cried Hetty. "He never meant it. He was mad; he didn't know what he said. Oh, boys, oh, father—don't quarrel, don't take up time, but hunt for Rob. Hunt everywhere. Find him, for mercy's sake, find him."

There was no need to urge them. The child was the idol of the house. Hate and anger were sunk in anxiety.

The search began at once. Loud blasts on a horn summoned the neighbors. Before the sun went down they had scoured the pine woods and the belt of swamp, and dragged the Sink and the lagoon for many yards. But save the fishing rod and the little catfish no trace was found of Rob.

He had fallen in the Sink while fishing and been devoured by the alligator—this was the belief of all but the Darke brothers and their father. They held to the suspicion that Hardy Brock had a hand in the child's disappearance. They had met his indignant denial with sneers and threatening looks. He had been the most active of those hunting for the child, though he kept apart from the Darkes.

It was after sundown when the searching party came through the swamp along the lagoon. They would go home and get lanterns and torches. The search would go on that night in the swamp farther down the lagoon—in the faint hope that the child had wandered so far.

"But it's no use. The boy didn't get lost, and he didn't get in the Sink of himself," said old Caleb Darke. Then he muttered grimly: "The one that put him there shall pay for it. I'd give my right eye to know about it tonight.

"Turn up to Cunjer Sam's cabin, boys," he called out.

"What, agin? We've searched Sam's cabin twice before—every crack and corner in it," said one.

"Don't matter; do as I tell you."

The party turned into the path that led up to a log hut, so low that its roof and chimney of mud and coquina rock just showed above the high stockade of close pine stakes that inclosed it. The men came to a halt in front of the strong, rough gate; it was fastened by a padlock and a big iron chain, and between its bars was thrust the muzzle of a large, wolf-like dog.

"Hello! Come out here, Sam. Call off that dog," shouted Caleb.

All was silent for a minute; then with the rattling of chains the cabin door swung wide, and in the low opening appeared the squat, powerful figure and hideous black face of Hoodoo Sam.

"Hyar! hyar! git back," he called to the dog in a deep, guttural voice, like the bellow of an alligator.

The animal withdrew its threatening muzzle and sullenly slunk away. The negro shuffled out to the gate, and stood behind its bars, a half grin upon his face, though his eyes, small, black, and alert like a snake's, darted a look of half apprehensive inquiry at each of the group.

"Wan' t' come in?" he asked.

"No; you come out here. I just want to talk to you."

The searching party now understood why their leader had made this third visit to the negro's hut. Grief and anxiety had caused old Darke to give in to a proposition he had scoffed at earlier in the day—that he should consult Hoodoo Sam as to what had become of Rob.

Caleb Darke was almost the only one of the settlers who refused to believe that the negro possessed the occult power ascribed to some of his race. The few negroes in the neighborhood were the first to declare that Sam was a conjurer and had dealings with the devil. The idea originated in his hideous appearance, his solitary way of living, his ability to handle unharmed a rattlesnake he had for a pet, and the mystery and suspicion that attended his advent.

He had suddenly appeared in the swamp one morning, crawling out of a shack of moss and palmetto leaves he had built in the night. He claimed to have run away from the Seminoles—that one independent tribe of Indians, who, intrenched in the fastness of the Everglades, defy the Emancipation Act and keep their negro slaves. These slaves, however, are treated almost as equals, and they cannot be induced to leave their master comrades. Hence the inference that Sam had committed some crime and was a fugitive from justice—a suspicion strengthened by his look of watchful apprehension and the fact that he had inclosed his hut by a high fence made of pine saplings set endwise in the ground. He was shunned by all, particularly the negroes,

and his cabin was never approached save when some one, whose pig, goat, chicken, or farming tool had disappeared, visited it secretly—ashamed of his superstition—to inquire of the Hoodoo oracle about the missing property.

Time and again the negro, or his rattlesnake familiar, which he always consulted, had been able to tell where the lost could be found, though the place he indicated, whether ditch, swamp, or negro's corn crib, had been unsuccessfully searched before. For such information the conjurer demanded silver. It was believed that he hoarded the money, as he was never known to spend any at the store, which he visited at rare intervals to exchange the flesh and skins of the wild animals he trapped, and upon which he chiefly subsisted, for tobacco, whisky and flour.

"See here, Sam," began Caleb Darke when the negro had shut the gate of his miniature fort behind him, and stood with his back against it, facing his visitors, "they say you're a conjurer and can tell things that's hid from folks that ain't friends with the devil. Now I want you to tell me what's gone with my Rob. Tell me that and I'll give you ten dollars—every cent I've got in the house."

The negro grinned, showing big canine teeth between his purplish lips. He shook his head.

"Sam no cunjer," he said. "All lie. Debil no Sam's fren'."

"I don't know that. You look enough like the devil to be close kin to him. Where's the snake that tells you things? Bring him out. Bring him out, I say," Caleb repeated with impatient sternness, as Sam hesitated.

"Yes, yes; me bring Boogger right off," the negro said briskly. He opened the gate and shuffled back to the cabin, entered it and came out directly carrying by the cord attached to it an iron cage. At the bottom of the cage lay a large rattlesnake asleep, its flat head resting on its coils.

Sam set the cage on the ground and squatted before it, opened the door and lifted out the snake with both hands. A strong, peculiar odor was perceived by those standing around him. Did it proceed from something the conjurer had rubbed over his hands?

"Wake up, Boogger," he said, shaking the reptile. The snake opened its eyes, arched its neck and moved its rattles, then turned its head to one side, making no attempt to bite or escape. Sam raised the flat head to his ear.

"Talk, Boogger," he said. The pointed tongue of the snake flashed out twice; the negro nodded his head and withdrew the snake. He put his horrible pet back into the cage and secured the door before he looked up at Darke.

"Boogger say don' know 'bout Rob. Won't talk. Maybe talk ef mo silber done gib."

"Darned humbug!" exclaimed Darke, giving the cage a kick that set the snake's rattles going. "I ought to be kicked myself for coming here on such an errand! What does that grinning idiot know? Only what he happens to guess at. Did he tell Brady where little Jimmy was? No; and the fool gave him money, too. Come along." He strode off through the palmetto scrub, followed by the other men. But Hetty, who had joined them

—too miserable to remain at home—went only a few steps, then fell back unobserved; she stood still, fighting against her horror of the African, then walked with a firm step back to the gateway in which Sam was standing watching her.

"Sam, you know more than you told my father," she said. "You can tell me where Rob is. Oh, Sam, tell me, I beg you; I will pay you well."

She held out her clasped hands to him in an agony of appeal; her sunbonnet had fallen off, her rich hair fell over her shoulders. The negro's eyes snapped as he looked at her; his thick lips worked before he spoke.

"How much you give?" he asked.

"I'll give you gold, Sam—two big gold pieces—two twenty dollar pieces. They are my own. My grandmother left them to me. You shall have them both, if you will only tell me where to find Rob."

"Gold! Big gold! Two twenty dollars! take me 'way—clear off; nebber fin' Sam," he muttered.

He looked at the girl. His breath came in quick snorts through his flat nostrils. She shuddered and struggled against the impulse to run. He thrust his head close to her, chuckling when he saw she could not help shrinking back.

"Come ternight, ten er'clock, ter Sink. Bring money. I tell you where Rob is."

"Is he alive? Oh, Sam, tell me if he is alive!"

"No tell now: come ternight; bring money."

"I will come. I will bring the money. I will be at the Sink at ten o'clock."

"No tell fader; brudder—no tell nobody. Mind dat," he hissed close to her ear.

A shuddering revulsion seized her. How could she meet this creature alone at night? But Rob!—she would give her life to have Rob in her arms.

"I will not tell anybody. I will come by myself," she answered. Then, not able to bear the strain any longer, she darted away and ran through the woods in the direction of home.

Hoodoo Sam looked after her and chuckled.

A pair of eyes that had been watching him over the top of the stockade at the back of the house disappeared; Hardy Brock slipped away. He had seen the interview and heard enough to know its import.

It was past nine o'clock that night when Hetty got up from her knees and wrapped her shawl about her. It was raining; the balmy day had been a storm breeder. After sundown the sky became overcast; only the full moon behind the cloud pall prevented the night from being very dark.

Hetty's father and brothers, with a few of their friends, had eaten supper and hurried away before seven o'clock. They ate in silence; their gloomy faces telling they had no hope to animate their dismal night search. They did not speak to Hetty. She felt that they looked upon her as the cause of Rob's fate.

She was more miserable than she could tell; but she clung to the thread of hope given her by Hoodoo Sam. She took the little box that held the

gold out of her trunk, and put it beneath her shawl. She had been very proud of the two gold pieces—that were to “buy a wedding dress for my little granddaughter and namesake, Hester Darke,” her grandmother’s will had said; but no shadow of regret at parting with them crossed her mind. As the old clock on the mantelpiece struck the half hour, she opened the door and went out into the rain and darkness.

But she had gone only a few steps beyond the gate when a tall figure stepped into the path just before her. “Hetty, go back home,” said Brock. “I know where you are going. I will keep that appointment.”

She held out the box. “Take the money and give it to him when he has shown you where Rob is.”

“No; keep the money. If he can show me where Rob is, he will do it without money. Go back now, Hetty darling.”

She turned without another word, comforted a little by her lover’s tender tone and her trust in his wisdom.

Hardy went on along the path, hearing the rain patter against the palmetto fans on either side. When within twenty yards of the Sink, he stopped and got behind a tree. He had not long to wait. In a few minutes he saw through the drizzling rain a dark shape move across the clear space in front of the Sink and stop in the black shadow of the live oak. There was only a single figure: the negro had not brought Rob.

Brock muttered, “’Twas a trick to get the money. He’d a’ grabbed it and flung Hetty in the Sink. Who was to know she didn’t drown herself? I’ll jes keep up with the black devil tonight.”

Bending his body to lessen the chance of being seen by the negro and keeping in the shadow of the trees until he was out of sight, he made his way to Sam’s cabin through the wet grass along the lagoon. The gate of the fence was locked. Peering above the pointed stakes, he saw the hut, dark save for a gleam of red firelight that came from under the door and through a crevice in the rock chimney. There were no cracks between the logs—they had been carefully chinked with moss and mud.

Brock was too active to find much difficulty in climbing over the wall. As he dropped on the other side, the dog jumped upon him and seized his leg. A well aimed blow from the butt end of his pistol had the effect of making the brute loose his hold. Another blow stretched the dog senseless.

“If he comes to he won’t bother me any more,” Brock said to himself.

He went to the hut and walked around it, examining it attentively. It was built close to the ground; there was no window. Hardy took his knife and picked out a piece of the mud and moss daubing from between the logs, making a hole through which, as he peered, he could see the interior of the hut. There was a fire on the hearth and an iron pot in which something bubbled and steamed. There was a pile of pine knots by the fire, a heap of moss—Sam’s bed—in the corner, the cage with its snake tenant, a stool and a rough table. There was nothing else. All was still, except the bubbling of the pot. What prompted Brock to put his mouth to the crack and call out, “Rob! Rob!” Then louder, “Rob, where are you?”

There was a sound in answer—a sort of muffled cry. A pulse of hope

leaped in him ; with the next breath there was disappointment. A louder cry—harsh, croaking—drew his eyes to the shelf above the chimney. A buzzard roosted there—its red, wrinkled neck stretched out in anger at being disturbed. It was the buzzard's cry he had heard before. He felt sure of this ; yet he longed to call again, only he was afraid he should be heard by Sam, who might be returning.

He replaced the bit of daubing, and looked around for a hiding place. In a corner of the small inclosure was a heap of pine knots and palmetto roots, piled there for fuel. He lay down close behind them and waited for the African.

It seemed to him he lay there a long time with the slow rain soaking through his clothes. At last he heard a heavy tread on the sodden ground, and next the rattling of chains as Sam unfastened first the gate and then the door of his domain. He dashed the door open with an oath. He was in a rage over his disappointment. Presently he called his dog. The brute, lying in the rain, had partly recovered from the stunning blow ; he got up slowly and obeyed his master's summons, receiving a kick as he slunk into the cabin. Then Sam shut the door of his hut and fastened it.

The rain increased to a heavy shower. Its rattle on the board roof of the hut prevented any sound of footsteps being heard, as Brock crept up to the back of the house. Cautiously he applied his eye to the crack. Sam had taken off the pot, and poured its contents into a wooden tray. This he placed on a stool, and sitting on the floor beside it, he was devouring the steaming, savory meat, stripping it, with his big teeth, from the bones he held in his right hand, and now and then taking bites of the corn ashcake he held in his left.

He ate rapidly, like some carnivorous beast, flinging the bones to the dog. When he had finished, he got on his feet, shoved the tray and stool to one side, and wiped his greasy face on the sleeve of his filthy shirt. He stood for a minute, listening to the rain and mumbling to himself. Then he took up a spade, and inserting its edge in one of the cracks between the split logs that formed the floor, lifted one of the logs and flung it to one side. He squatted beside the space it left ; stooping lower, he thrust his long, ape-like arms into what seemed a hole or pit under the floor and lifted out something wrapped in a coarse blanket.

The folds of the grimy cloth fell away as the negro raised the bundle, and Brock came near shouting aloud as he saw the flaxen head and white face of little Rob. He thought the child was dead until he saw the round eyes were wide open, and fixed in a stare of wild terror upon the face of his negro captor.

Hoodoo Sam put the child on the floor. "Set up," he said, giving the limp figure a shake. He got some food from the tray and put it into the boy's hand, telling him to eat. But Rob did not move ; he seemed too dazed to comprehend.

"Eat," growled the negro. "I make Boogger bite you." The child's scared eyes sent a look across the room to the cage where the snake lay ; then, with a spasmodic jerk, the small hand clutched the bread and went to the trembling mouth. But the effort to eat broke off in a sob.

"Lemme go home ; please lemme go home !" wailed the child.

Sam caught him by the shoulders. "Shet mouf !" he exclaimed, showing his teeth in rage. "I make Boogger jump on you."

He rushed across the room, caught up the cage and set it down close to the child. "Make noise one time, me open cage ; Boogger jump on you, lak he jump on lil' Jimmy. He bite lil' Jimmy—an' him done dead ; flung ter alligator." The child shrank back and crouched on the floor, shaking with terror, his eyes fixed in piteous appeal on the mocking face of the negro.

Brock could stand it no longer. Grasping the axe he had brought from the wood pile, he rushed to the front of the hut and began to break down the door. With the third blow of the axe, the boards crashed in, and he leaped through the opening. The African confronted him, brandishing a knife, his eyes blazing, his mouth distorted in a grin of horrible ferocity.

It was knife against axe. Neither had time to get other weapons. The negro dodged the blows aimed at him with cat-like activity, all the while trying to get in a thrust with his knife. He succeeded at length ; the thin, keen blade found its way into Brock's shoulder and snapped against the bone. The negro wheeled to get his gun, but a bullet from Brock's pistol struck his arm, and suddenly turning, he leaped like a madman upon the young man and hurled him to the floor.

Brock was no match in strength for the powerful African. Before he recovered from the shock of the fall, he was pinned to the floor and his revolver wrenched from his hand. One of his arms was held down by the negro's knee ; with the other, he struggled desperately to keep his assailant from planting the muzzle of the revolver against his breast. In the scuffle Boogger's cage was overturned, and the shrill rattling of the angry snake added to the horror of the moment.

At last Brock's right wrist was caught by the negro's left hand and held as in a vise ; then, with a grunt of exultation, Sam turned the pistol to the defenseless heart of his foe, who, panting and helpless, closed his eyes and waited for the bullet that should tear flesh and soul asunder. But instead there came a yell of pain and terror from the African, and the weapon dropped from his hand.

In an instant, Brock saw what had happened. The rattlesnake had attacked his owner. Brock saw the head of the reptile, with its wide mouth and hooked fangs, as it reared back after giving the blow, and then darted down, striking again and again before one could draw breath, burying his fangs in the naked arm and the face of the negro, who seemed paralyzed for a second. Then, springing to his feet, Hoodoo Sam seized the axe and began to strike at the snake with furious blows, his teeth set and the foam dropping from his distorted mouth.

Boogger was game. He fought to the last, until one of the blows of the axe severed his head. With a yell, the frenzied negro caught up the head and the mangled coils and flung them into the fire ; then he dropped down on the pile of moss in the corner that served him as a bed, where he lay panting and exhausted.

The fight between snake and man had not lasted two minutes; Brock had time only to scramble to his feet, catch up little Rob, and retreat to a safe corner. Now, with the child clinging convulsively to his neck, he approached Hoodoo Sam. He knew the negro's time was short. One bite of such a rattlesnake would be fatal, and Sam had received half a dozen.

"Sam's dead man," panted the African, turning his bloodshot eyes upon his late assailant. "Debil git Sam. Been mighty bad. Kill Injun Wakola; scare baby Jimmy to det wit Boogger 'cause he make noise. Now Boogger bite Sam; he die fer sure." A spasm of pain cut short his speech. The poison in his heated blood had coursed quickly through his frame. Brock took a flask of whisky from his pocket and gave it to him; he clutched the flask eagerly and drank half of it at a draft.

The strong liquor revived him for a little.

"Thankee; whisky good," he said. "Sam sorry he cut wid knife. Not bad cut; git well soon. Sorry took lil' Rob. No aim ter hurt um. Want git money ter go way off on boat, so Injun can't find; Injun kill Sam. Oh, Lor'! hav' mussey! have mussey!" he broke off as a convulsion seized him, and caused him to writhe in agony. When it passed, the poor wretch lay exhausted and gasping. Brock gave him the remainder of the whisky, but he had hardly swallowed it when another spasm of pain contorted his features, and he rolled over the floor, tearing his clothes from his body.

Thereafter the paroxysms came on with increasing violence and at shorter intervals, until the strong, savage life was extinguished. Gathering all his vital forces for a final struggle, the negro sprang to his feet, threw out his knotted arms and clenched hands, then moaning out the prayer "Lor hav' mussey!" fell to the floor, dead. Brock turned him on his back and put a roll of moss under his head. Then, with Rob in his arms, he ran out of the hut, feeling as though he had just escaped from the infernal regions.

The rain was over; the cool salt air refreshed him and revived the half fainting child. He burst out crying and sobbing on his preserver's neck. Brock soothed him with assurances that it was all over, telling him he was safe and sound.

"Take me home, Hardy; take me to Hetty," he pleaded.

"We are going home now as fast as I can walk. Don't you see the light? Hetty is up waiting to give you supper. Cheer up."

The Darkes had returned from their fruitless expedition. They were drying themselves by the fire, and drinking the hot coffee brought to them by Hetty, whose white face and swollen eyes told that she had given up all hope. Suddenly the door was thrown open; an amazing apparition stood before them—Brock, pale, bare headed, and blood stained, with Rob—living Rob, in his arms.

The young man was well nigh exhausted, but he told his story. He did not speak of his wound; it was Hetty's eyes that saw the blood on his shirt. She transferred Rob to his father, while she bound up the ugly cut, her brothers assisting her. The two big fellows seemed to think they could not do or say enough to show their gratitude to Brock and their admiration of his pluck and discernment.

A little later, when the wounded hero was resting easily in the arm-chair of honor, with Hetty by him and Rob asleep in his trundle bed, the male Darkes, moved by curiosity, started to go to the scene of the tragedy.

Before they reached the swamp, a glare of light through the trees told them the hut was in flames. It had no doubt caught on fire from the blazing brands on the hearth that had been scattered over the floor during the struggle between Brock and the negro. The resinous pine logs burned like tinder. The hut was nearly consumed when the Darkes reached the place.

Next day the ashes were searched, and the bones of the negro found and cofined. In the center of the burned spot was discovered the oblong pit, in which little Jimmy, and afterwards Rob, had been hidden. Baby Jimmy had died of fright and suffocation before Sam was ready to restore him to his home, as he declared, when dying, he had intended to do.

In the pit, buried a foot below the surface, was found a tin can half full of small coins—the proceeds of the swindle the reputed conjurer had practised upon the farmers, whose property he had stolen and concealed, then restored by night after the owners had paid him for mysteriously disclosing where it could be found.

The negro's remains were buried, and his hoardings were by common consent given to a poor widow, who had suffered more than once from his hoodoo tricks.

Hardy Brock did not go to California. He married Hetty and lived with her in her Florida home, where she continued to keep house for her father and to look after the adventurous Rob.

Mary E. Bryan.

PRAIRIE VOICES.

WIND of the prairie, you speak to me
With the siren voice of the mighty sea ;
You whisper and sigh in chant-like swells,
Like the melodies locked in your pearly shells ;
Your tempest tone is the clarion blast
That shatters the rigging and tears the mast ;
You moan like the wail of a long lost soul—
'Tis the sea nymph's spirit that mourns for the roll
And the splash of the waters that used to flow
Out to the West in the long ago.
Oh, prairie winds, you've a voice for me
Like the siren voice of the mighty sea !
'Tis only an echo, like memory,
But I hear it calling and calling away,
And I long with you for the sea today.

Emma Playter Seabury.

A MONTH IN THE MOON.*

The marvelous experiences that grew out of the Lunar Company, Limited—How the catch-penny scheme of three adventurers was transformed into an extraordinary contribution to the world of science—Scenes and incidents of a sojourn on the earth's satellite.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

MESSRS. GRYPHINS, VOGEL, AND WAGNER, three adventurers in Melbourne, Australia, start The Lunar Company, for the Conquest and Exploration of the Mineral Riches of the Moon. The control of the enterprise passes into the hands of Norbert Mauny, a young French scientist, who has a plan of attracting the moon to the earth by erecting a series of powerful magnets, The Bayouda Desert in the Soudan is selected as the site. At Suakim Mauny meets the French consul, M. Kersain, and his daughter Gertrude, who decide to accompany him on a visit to the Mogaddem of Rhadameh, a local ruler whose favor must be obtained before the transportation of the material across the desert can be made.

After promising to pay certain large sums as tribute, Norbert secures the coöperation he desires and the expedition sets out for the Bayouda Desert. Here the reflectors are erected on the Peak of Tehbali, and work proceeds with gratifying success till Messrs. Gryphins, Vogel, and Wagner are detected in a conspiracy to turn the workmen against Norbert. They are imprisoned, and then Norbert, hearing that trouble threatens Khartoum, where M. Kersain has been transferred, determines to go thither and see if he cannot induce him and his daughter to take refuge at the Peak.

The consul refuses to leave his post, but it is finally arranged that Gertrude, accompanied by Dr. Briet, her uncle, and Fatima, her maid, set out with Norbert for Tehbali. On the road they are intercepted by Kaddour, the Mogaddem's dwarf, who makes them all prisoners and endeavors to obtain Gertrude's hand in marriage. Failing in this he resolves to march with the forces he possesses on the Peak, taking the prisoners with him, and there destroy before their very eyes the work on which Mauny has built such high hopes. But the men employed by the young astronomer and those in the service of the dwarf come from the same country, and they refuse to fight against one another. Kaddour is taken captive and placed in charge of Virgil, Mauny's right hand man. Discovered in an attempt to win away the allegiance of the negro guard, he is condemned to be shot, but swallows poison just before the execution is to take place. Soon afterward the Mahdi's forces surround the Peak and call upon Mauny to surrender, which he stoutly refuses to do.

Meantime the magnets are working splendidly, and at length Norbert sets in operation the forces that, in six days, are to bring the moon down to the earth. The satellite responds readily, and by the sixth day is so close and appears so immense that not only are the Mahdi's forces utterly panic stricken, but Norbert's party themselves are terrified. Sir Bucephalus Coghill, one of the chief members of the company, ventures to hint to the young astronomer that he thinks it would be safer for all hands if the experiment be stopped—which Mauny says can be done by simply touching two knobs—when the baronet's valet, Tyrrel Smith, in an agony of apprehension, rushes to the tablet where the knobs controlling all the motors are situated, raises one and lowers another. A fearful crash ensues and all are thrown into insensibility.

When they come to again the astounding discovery is made that the whole mountain of Tehbali, with the observatory and all that it contains, has been transferred to the moon. As soon as he realizes what has happened, Norbert hastens to close and hermetically seal all the windows, in order that no air may escape, as the moon being without atmosphere, man cannot breathe there. However, he provides respirators, with which he and the baronet are enabled to start out on an exploring trip. They find that they cannot make any audible sounds and are obliged to communicate with each other by means of note books.

**This story began in the February issue of THE ARGOSY. The five back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 50 cents.*

A far more important discovery, however, is that of an opening into the crater of an extinct volcano, which has become filled with air from the earth. In order to preserve as much of this as possible for future use, Norbert hastens back to the observatory for help and tools, leaving Sir Bucephalus to gather together as many stones as he can for the barricade in the meantime. The whole party accompany the young astronomer on his return, but the baronet has disappeared and cannot be found.

On the return to the observatory the body of the dwarf is discovered exposed to view by the recent catastrophe, and perceiving signs of life in it, Dr. Briet sets to work and soon has Kaddour restored to life, he having forced himself into a state of catalepsy. He is kindly treated by all and sensibly melts under these influences. Meanwhile petty thefts of food have been noticed, and one day the valet, Smith, catches sight of the thief and pursuit is made. It is then discovered that Gryphins, Vogel, and Wagner are also on the moon, have captured the baronet, robbed him of his respirator, and used that as a means of getting to the observatory and stealing two others. The baronet is released and the three directors placed in captivity.

On first beholding them Kaddour becomes much excited and begs Mauny to hand them over to him for punishment, for it turns out that they had kidnapped him when a boy and distorted his body in order to fit him to fill the place of a dwarf who had died and whom they had been exhibiting.

Time passes and the moon's night of two weeks approaches.

CHAPTER XXXVII.—THE INVISIBLE HEMISPHERE.

WHILE making preparations for a visit to the invisible hemisphere, Norbert did not content himself with merely laying in a good store of chlorate of potassium wherewith to renew the oxygen in the respirators; he also invented, as a protection from the burning sun, a kind of hat parasol furnished with a curtain behind, to protect the back of the neck, and in front a linen peak, having at the level of the eyes two blue glasses let in as a preventative of ophthalmia.

Thanks to this ingenious precaution, Kaddour and he, with their scientific apparatus and sufficient provisions for two days, got through the journey of three hundred leagues from the crater of Reticus to the other lunar hemisphere within eighteen hours, and without any accident.

Had they not taken all this care, they must have succumbed to the heat at the end of a few hours. It was trying at all times, but it became really intolerable when walking was prolonged. Norbert and his companion remembered the experiences of the desert, and knew exactly when it was time to rest, eat, or renew the gas in the apparatus with the aid of a little spirit lamp, fed by a modicum of oxygen, and a glass globe full of chlorate of potassium. They reached the end of their weary stage, therefore, less tired than they might have been.

It was a cruel privation, however, not to be able to exchange ideas on a journey like this. But they managed to converse by signs, and Norbert improved in this simple art as they went along; in a few hours he was able to express himself intelligibly, and to understand all the dwarf intended.

As they drew near the hidden face of the moon, Norbert could scarcely contain his impatience, and kept gesticulating from time to time as follows:

"I am positively dying to know what it is we are going to see! Just think, Kaddour, what a singular piece of luck for an astronomer! I am actually about to behold what no one as yet has any idea of! The sublime panorama of the lunar night is to be unfolded for our benefit alone, and from

this vantage ground in space, forbidden as it is to earthly telescopes, we shall contemplate the starry constellations of the solar world ! ”

“ But do you not think that the invisible hemisphere will be just like this one ? ” asked Kaddour, wishing to be informed, and at the same time to save Norbert (whom he was daily learning to like better) from a dire disappointment.

“ It is,” replied Norbert, “ not merely the unknown surface of the moon that we long to see, but also the spectacle of the starry heavens from this new and incomparable point of view. It will be beautiful, Kaddour ! We shall both feel that we are looking for the first time, as it were, upon the Great Bear, Cassiopeia, the Lyre, the Milky Way, and all the other familiar details of the sky ; they will be brought out into high relief, and shown to the greatest advantage, on the black ground of this perfect night ! ”

Conversing thus by signs, Norbert, spurred on by his own enthusiasm, redoubled the pace, and took great strides of forty or fifty yards at once, so that the poor dwarf could scarcely keep up with him.

At length the travelers reached a height to the west that they had been nearing for some time past. Norbert rightly supposed it to form part of the “ parallaxic fringe,” an intermediate region sometimes visible and anon hidden from the earth on account of the moon’s libration.

He was not mistaken. Scarcely had they passed the summit when the sun became only partially visible above the horizon. All at once it vanished, and our friends found themselves, without any transition, plunged into the darkest night !

Then, at last, the spectacle so longed for by Norbert burst upon him in its full splendor.

Innumerable stars gleamed like diamonds in an ink black sky devoid of either earth or moon. They were as perfectly motionless as is the polar star. For three hundred and fifty hours consecutively they reigned in the cloudless atmosphere, and offered to the beholder every opportunity of taking the minutest observation as to their altitude and configuration. It was, indeed, what Norbert had expected to see, but the reality was dazzling in its grandeur.

When he recovered sufficiently to set up his telescope he found himself almost paralyzed with cold. His jaws were contracted, and all his limbs numbed. His lungs could scarcely breathe the oxygen of his respirator, and there was a keen pain across his temples. Another minute and he would have frozen.

He was turning back with a gesture of impatience to tell Kaddour that they must perforce return to the lighted zone, when on a sudden he caught sight afar off of a red glare upon the surface of the moon. One might have taken its flickering to proceed from a beacon fire.

“ It is a lighthouse or a volcano ! ” thought Norbert.

He took Kaddour by the hand as if he were a child of four years old, and ran toward it as hard as he could. The violent exercise soon warmed them both, and they went such a pace that they soon got over the three or four leagues separating them from the fire.

It was, indeed, a volcano in miniature, for the orifice was not ten yards across. It was the last survivor of a myriad other craters now extinct forever, the last spark of some gigantic fire that had once raged throughout the plain.

But, small as it was, the miniature volcano gave out a welcome heat. Kaddour and Norbert encamped thankfully beside the fire and warmed their frozen limbs, delighted to be able to breathe freely once more.

Every now and again the crater belched forth fire and smoke, and was lit by the expiring flames, while a subterranean grumbling rolled out ever and anon with a kind of sigh, after which silence would reign for an instant. During these intervals Norbert fancied he heard water flowing.

Looking about for the cause of the noise, he discovered at the foot of the crater on the opposite side a tiny geyser quite in keeping with the volcano that fed it. From it rose a waterspout about a yard in height, that increased to seven or eight yards when the explosions took place.

The water was not good—it was full of sulphurous cinders that made it nauseous; but still it was water, and a treasure, therefore, not to be despised. They determined to remain there, and, fortifying themselves with a substantial repast of biscuit, cold meat, and tea, they wrapped themselves in woollen coverings and were soon fast asleep, taking the precaution to renew the oxygen in the heat of the waterspout.

When he awoke Norbert set up his telescope and studied the sky. There was not time for him to take many observations, but he saw enough to give him an idea of what might have been the result to science had it been possible to set up an observatory there.

Uranus and Neptune were not visible. He looked at Saturn, remembering well the first time he had seen the planet, when one day in his youth he had been allowed to look through an ordinary telescope in a public garden, and had then and there settled on his future career.

But what was that early impression to his present emotion as he noted the clear brightness of the mysterious ring that surrounds Saturn as with a golden band! The ring appeared divided into three segments, and formed of several concentric circles. The shadow it cast upon the planet, as well as the shadow cast by the planet upon it, and the bands encircling the globe, all stood out like a flame colored drawing on the background of black sea. One might have thought only a few yards separated the moon from the planet, and that one only had to stretch out a hand, as it were, to touch that far distant world.

If he could have spared the time, what discoveries might not Norbert have made from such a vantage ground in the fervor of his scientific genius! What interesting observations of the starry heavens! What studies in spectral analysis! He gazed at the wonders above him till time itself was forgotten, and he no longer knew whether he was in the moon or suspended in space, beyond the condition of mortality.

On a sudden his sleeve was pulled, and looking down, coming down from the highest heaven, he beheld Kaddour raising beseeching eyes to him.

"Ah, it is you, Kaddour! Do you want to look through the telescope?"

"Do you know how long you have been star gazing?" said Kaddour, in pautomimic language.

"No; perhaps thirty minutes or more."

"Four hours!" answered Kaddour. "I should not have disturbed you now, only that I am afraid your friends will be anxious."

"You are right, and I am much obliged to you for reminding me, Kaddour. We must not alarm them uselessly. But just take a glance at the rings of Saturn, and at anything else you like in the sky, then we will pack up and go back."

Twenty hours later the two weary travelers returned to the observatory.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.—THE MANUSCRIPT.

ON returning to Tehbali, Norbert and Kaddour recounted their adventures in the invisible hemisphere, and heard in return a full account of Gertrude's discovery. Norbert at once announced his intention of visiting the selenic monument without delay. Gertrude and the doctor accompanied him.

He had no sooner entered the building than his eye was arrested by a strange peculiarity in all the frescoes and bas reliefs, which was indeed well calculated to strike the eye of an astronomer. Two suns were represented in the lunar sky—one small, the other large.

His companion looked on with the deepest attention while Norbert explained on his fingers the reason of the phenomenon.

"There can be little doubt," he said, "that the big sun in these decorations represents the earth still in an incandescent stage, which is in itself a proof of the extreme antiquity of this building. Its preservation is due to the non existence of rain, wind, or atmospheric disturbance of any kind, and the variations of lunar temperature have probably but little effect."

Remarking the pyramidal shape of the edifice, he continued:

"It would seem that the Selenites were acquainted with the laws of mechanics before the earth was sufficiently cold to admit of life upon her surface. As weight is six times less here than on terrestrial soil, the buildings had to be raised accordingly on much wider and deeper foundations. The Selenites knew this; hence their monument stands after myriads of ages have passed."

"What can this be?" asked Gertrude, stopping short before a kind of triangular frame that she had not noticed on her first visit.

On examination it turned out to be an immense door, closed by means of metallic slides shutting like a fan one over the other. This door gave access into a second hall, which, unlike the other, was not empty. It contained a great many articles of furniture, all of them broad and massive, reminding one of a pyramid, even the seats going up into a point.

These latter, of colossal dimensions, were intended, apparently, for forms as gigantic as the Buddhas of the Indian temples. This hypothesis was confirmed by the discovery that they were all made of fine gold, now much tarnished by time. On the earth these seats would have been of enormous value from a pecuniary point of view.

"It is marvelous!" spelt the the doctor on his fingers. "The Selenites must have known how to make gold; they must have been possessed of the so called philosopher's stone of the alchemists."

"What, uncle!" asked Gertrude, "is it possible that you believe in the science of alchemy?"

"I do not believe that they have ever found out yet how to make gold, but I do not see why they should not succeed," answered he. "Modern chemistry is day by day reducing the number of elementary bodies. For aught we know, she may one day prove that gold is simply composed of a solidified gas as common as nitrogen. It would only add one more to the long list of surprises in nature."

They had reached a door similar to the first, opening in the same way. In the third hall beyond a marvelous sight awaited them.

In the middle rose an immense catafalque (if the eight or ten storied structure could with propriety be so termed). On the highest story lay a statue of colossal proportions, in the attitude of sleep, a ray of light falling on it through the crystal apertures in the roof. It was a sleeping statue of Hercules; but how far superior to the earthly Hercules in every respect was this image of massive gold!

"I must measure it!" said the doctor to himself, as not without difficulty, he climbed the steps of the catafalque.

When he reached the top he took a tape from his pocket, and had just ascertained the length to be thirty feet from the head to the feet when the statue crumbled away. Yet he had scarce even touched it.

The features disappeared in a cloud of gold dust, and in their place the doctor saw only a colossal skull.

"A skeleton!" he cried. "It is the skeleton of a Titan!"

Caught up and repeated by four or five echoes, the voice resounded through the vast hall as if it had been the nave of some cathedral.

There was air in the hall, then!

The doctor's discovery was so absorbing that they scarcely noticed this last fact.

It was indeed a human skeleton thirty feet long. There it lay, still half covered with its gold cuticle.

"So we may conclude that the moon was inhabited, and the Selenites were giants!" said the doctor.

"At all events, this one was a giant," said Norbert laughing, and glad to find his tongue unchained at last.

"Not only this one," replied the doctor from his high perch. "A gigantic stature was imperative for the inhabitants of the moon. As its gravity is six times less than that of our globe, trees, plants, animals, and selenic men (where there were such) were necessarily bound to develop proportionately in height and muscular strength."

"But," asked Gertrude, "how do you explain this sudden transformation of a gold statue into a skeleton?"

"It never was a statue. Evidently the Selenites had a custom similar to that of Egypt, of enveloping their dead in thin metallic shrouds. I should

not wonder if the specimen before us had been so treated. I, by my imprudence, have destroyed what even the centuries respected."

The doctor was about to descend, when he noticed a roll of paper in the skeleton's hands. Taking it from its silent possessor, he found it was inscribed all over with strange characters.

"Here is the greatest marvel of all," he said, leaping down with his prize.

He was in such haste to examine it at ease, that he proposed an immediate return. They retraced their steps, therefore, conversing as long as they had air.

"The air that we have just left," said Norbert, "was at one time in the past hermetically sealed in that confined place; it shows that at that period the atmosphere in the moon must have been like our own. Perhaps it has only lost its oxygen in the course of the ages, and hence has become unfit to sustain life. What remains must, in my opinion, be pure nitrogen, more or less. It would be easy to ascertain the fact, and also exceedingly useful to us now."

On returning to the observatory, the doctor made haste to study his papyrus. But after some hours of vain effort he was obliged to own that he had failed.

Noticing his discomfiture, Kaddour asked and received permission to try his skill on the selenic document. At the end of a quarter of an hour he gave it thus:

"Sun, the Son of the Northern Star, slept the last sleep on the fourth day of the ninth year year of the thirty second cycle."

This translation was received with some little incredulity at first, but Kaddour held to his point with so much vigor that the doctor was at last convinced, and could not but admire the sagacity of the little man.

On which the dwarf observed with some show of reason that the papyrus was a good instance of writing being used to represent not words, but ideas, that were independent of languages, and could be understood by all men alike.

CHAPTER XXXIX.—PREPARATIONS FOR THE RETURN.

NORBERT, at this moment returning from the chemical laboratory, where he had been shut up for some time alone, inquired what was the subject they were discussing.

"I should be very much disposed, for my part," he said at once, "to admit Kaddour's theory. It has a tendency to prove that the Selenites were accustomed to take the names of stars, which is appropriate to a race that possessed such exceptional opportunities of knowing the science of the heavens. The cycle here mentioned is probably a great astronomical cycle, which is a confirmation of our first impression, concerning the very great antiquity of the papyrus. I myself, moreover," continued Norbert, "have made the important discovery that the lunar atmosphere is composed of nitrogen, mingled with some traces of oxygen."

"This fact also explains the perfect transparency of this atmosphere and its absolute dryness. Another phenomenon which puzzled me is now also made plain—that we can breathe for three or four hours or more with the small provision of oxygen in our respirators. A proportion of twenty to twenty three per cent of this oxygen, mingled with lunar nitrogen, gives us air as breathable as that of earth. As our respirators do not fit quite tightly on our faces, the two gases are able to unite, and so we are able to breathe freely."

"Well, that is something worth hearing," said the doctor.

"We are certain," continued Norbert, "to have sufficient air now, for, instead of our being obliged, as I thought, to consume pure oxygen towards the end, we need only manufacture a mixture of nitrogen and oxygen, or in other words make as much artificial air as we want for internal use in the observatory."

"Then you are decidedly of opinion," inquired the doctor, "that the air of the moon has been analogous to ours in proportion to its destiny, and that she has gradually used up her oxygen?"

"Precisely. We have the proof in the remnant of old air in the crypt of the selenic building, and the fact that life, once existent on the moon, has now disappeared. You will note also the visible predominance of iron in all the surrounding rocks; they are all deeply oxidized. The animal, vegetable, and mineral world of the moon absorbed all its oxygen, and life then became extinct."

Norbert's news had put every one into good humor. They were all, therefore, eager to help him after dinner in storing up heat for the needs of the long lunar night. For this purpose a number of solar condensers were set to work to heat gigantic stones to a white heat, which were then laid under the floor of the store rooms.

At the same time large quantities of oxygen were fabricated to renew the air of the crater, which was beginning to rarefy.

It only remained to bear patiently the long monotonous lunar night, until, with the return of the sun, the conical mirrors would be once more set going, and the weary travelers attempt to regain their native soil.

But what untold dangers might not attend this grand effort of the castaways!

Norbert was resolved to leave nothing to chance, or to the possible imprudence of one of his companions, as the whole responsibility rested upon him, the leader and chief. He invented a new mechanism to set the central apparatus at work, but resolved to keep it a profound secret. It was similar to the patented lock of a strong box, and opened at a given word only. He alone had it in his power to establish the contact, and transform the rock of Tehbali into a magnet once more.

The last hours of the day were devoted to constructing a lofty iron fence on the esplanade to support a horizontal axis of polished steel. On this was to be suspended at the right moment a large silken parachute, held open by movable framework, and furnished with a car, in which the eleven castaways were to seat themselves, in readiness for the descent the moment the moon

was sufficiently near the earth. Their weight would act as ballast, and bear the aerial ship towards the greater attracting power, the earth.

CHAPTER XL.—AN ECLIPSE OF THE SUN.

MEANWHILE, Norbert lost no opportunity of studying the heavens, especially the protuberances of the sun, and he perceived that the sun was about to be eclipsed by the earth. He hastened to inform his companions of the interesting spectacle soon to be unfolded before their admiring eyes. The enormous dimensions of the earth, as it appeared in the lunar sky, led them to expect some wonderful effects, but the reality far surpassed their imagination.

They had scarcely time to take up their position on the esplanade (furnished with smoked glasses for the protection of the eyes, and with the indispensable store of oxygen), when the contact was established.

First, a golden crescent slowly wound round the earth, casting a radiant aureole over the black disk. Little by little, as the sun disappeared behind the earth, the golden aureole crept on until it surrounded the whole circumference of the terrestrial screen, and completed the occultation, to the intense admiration of the spectators.

All around the immense disk, equal in appearance to fourteen moons seen from the earth, shone an orange colored ring of light, bordered by a scarlet ring. The lunar landscape, which was now in shade, assumed a rosy tint that softened all the details, touching the summits and craters with violet colored rays of fairy-like beauty.

Our travelers were so enraptured with the soft effects of the waves of light on the lunar landscape, that they could not for some time tear themselves away from the spectacle. But at length they returned to the drawing room to exchange their ideas, remembering also that the eclipse would last some hours longer.

Norbert's first care was to photograph the country under its new aspect, as he had already done in its ordinary dress. He managed to get a tolerably good negative.

Gertrude had her thoughts too. Impelled by pity, she suddenly said to him: "Monsieur Mauny, I want to ask you a favor."

"Is it necessary for me to tell you that I shall only be too happy to grant it?"

"I cannot help pitying those four prisoners for not being able to see this marvelous eclipse. It is hard enough that they should be exiled on the moon, and yet know nothing of her curious sights. Could you not allow them to see the eclipse?"

"Nothing easier. Virgil takes them for a walk twice daily round the circular passage. He shall let them out now."

"Oh, give them a complete holiday! Let them come on the esplanade. They could see nothing from the circular passage."

"Be it so. You have heard, Virgil, what mademoiselle wishes. Let them go out at once."

At this moment Norbert, happening to look at Kaddour, who was helping him in his photographic operations, was amazed at his expression.

"What is it?" he said. "Are you surprised that a little humanity should be shown those unhappy beings, worthless though they be?"

"Unhappy! Those vile scoundrels unhappy!" roared Kaddour. "Do you call them unhappy when they are only imprisoned in their own lodging, and fed like princes? Are they to be amused in addition? Ah! I would amuse them nicely if I had the chance!"

Just at this moment Virgil was bringing the prisoners through the circular passage to the edge of the esplanade. There was no danger of any attempt at escape, on account of the impossibility of breathing without oxygen; they were therefore left entirely free.

Norbert was afraid that this might exasperate Kaddour, and consequently sent him to the photographic laboratory, to take proofs from the negative. The prisoners were allowed two hours' liberty, and only at the close of the eclipse were they led back to their prison. Kaddour and the others were then summoned to witness the last phase of the phenomenon, which was quite worthy of the beginning.

On his return to his room, Norbert took the opportunity to question Virgil concerning the general behavior of the prisoners. He learned that they were tolerably submissive, and even grateful for the consideration shown them, but terribly lazy and most suspicious.

"I cannot get out of their heads that you intend to leave them here when we go," said Virgil. "I have tried every argument I could think of to convince them of your good faith. But it is of no use. They have a rooted conviction that it is but natural you should treat them as doubtless they would not hesitate to treat you in like case."

"Tell them," answered Norbert, "that I am not going to let them escape a public exposure. They need not think they are going to get off with a few days' imprisonment. I intend to denounce them before the first tribunal available, before any jury, so long as it be composed of honest men, who shall arbitrate between them and me. They shall lose nothing by waiting, they may depend upon that! But keep on repeating that I have not the slightest idea of leaving them here. Moreover, I shall take into account the assistance they have rendered in putting our machines into working order, and my indulgence shall be in exact proportion to their industry!"

The succeeding hours were utilized in making the final preparations for the coming lunar night.

Twenty two tons of chlorate of potassium had been employed in the fabrication of the oxygen, that, flowing through a leathern tube, was to mingle with the remaining air in the crater. They had eight casks in reserve, and there was every hope that nothing would happen to prevent the final departure.

The parabolic mirrors had all been repaired. It only remained to stop up the doors and windows from the extreme cold, and lay in a good stock of patience for the prodigious night of three hundred and fifty four hours now so close at hand.

The sun drew near the western horizon of the lunar heavens. He reached it and sank slowly behind the neighboring mountains.

The spectacle was curious from its novelty, but there was none of the splendor that had signalized the eclipse, nor was there even the beauty of an earthly sunset. That marvelous lighting up of height after height, the clouds of purple and gold, and fan-like rays of light which the great luminary displays at the hour of departure, were unknown on the moon, for the reason that the lunar atmosphere, being perfectly translucent, knows neither clouds nor vapor.

The sun therefore simply went down without any firework parade. His disk slowly sank lower and lower for the space of an hour, and then disappeared from view, leaving a few golden streaks on the highest summits for a few minutes, after which, without the transition of twilight, night settled down in all its darkness over the visible face of the moon.

CHAPTER XLI.—THE EARTHLIGHT.

NIGHT on the visible side of the moon is not nearly so dark as on the other hemisphere. It is rather a kind of clear twilight that softens all the surroundings.

Gertrude Kersain had seated herself near one of the drawing room windows to look out on the lunar landscape under its novel aspect. It was more fantastic now than it had been even under the rays of the sun.

The little flock of craters nestling at the foot of Tehbali were bathed in the silvery light on one side, while the other slept in utter darkness. Everything was perfectly motionless, and the cold, clear light lent such a strange, weird appearance to it all that Gertrude, mechanically, as it were, looked about for the cause.

Leaning out of the right side of the window, she caught sight in the heavens of an enormous star that she had never before seen. Its disk was immense, measuring apparently two or three yards, and it diffused a wan light similar to that of the moon, only fifteen or twenty times stronger.

Gertrude could not repress a cry of admiration mingled with fear. Norbert heard her, and came up at once.

"Look!" she said, pointing to the marvelous star. "What is that?"

"Do you not recognize your native land?" said Norbert, laughing. "That is the Earth. Our very own old Earth, who is kindly lessening the horrors of our lunar night by giving us her light. We shall have it all along."

"How strange, and yet it is only natural! I might have known that we should enjoy here the earthlight in place of the moonlight of other times. But it startled me at first to see that grand disk! It reminded me of the aspect of the moon on the third day of the grand experiment, and I was really half afraid of another catastrophe! What are those clearly defined marks on a black ground? One looks a little like Africa—there to the left!"

"It is quite the shape of Africa! It is Africa! If you come to the Hall of Telescopes I will show it to you through the glasses."

"Really? Let us go directly! Fatima! Uncle! Come and see what

no one has ever seen yet! The whole of Africa in the field of vision at once!"

"With the addition of half Asia and Europe," said Norbert, going towards the observatory, followed by all the others.

Here, seated in a comfortable armchair in front of the telescope, Gertrude enjoyed the great happiness of seeing not only Africa, but the region bounded by the Red Sea, the Soudan itself. There it was spread out like a map drawn in bright lines on a background of black clouds. The black clouds were the ocean.

"It is really wonderful!" said Gertrude. "How clearly and distinctly we can see it! And to think that my dear father is there, grieving over the loss of his daughter! Oh! Monsieur Norbert, you who are so learned, can you not devise some means of sending him a message?"

"Alas! it is perhaps not impossible, but it would in any case entail very long preparations, without any strong probability of being understood, or even seen," answered the young man, deeply grieved to see tears in the girl's eyes. "But I beg you," he continued, "not to be so wretched. You shall see him again soon, I promise. Courage, Mademoiselle Gertrude! You have been so brave hitherto!"

"I will try," she said, with a faint attempt at a smile. "But you have no idea what I feel in seeing the world that contains my father, hanging as it were in the sky. It seems to me that I must be dead and looking down on him; or else that he is dead! Never did I realize till now the terrible distance between us!"

"What matters the distance, since we can traverse it? We have done so already, and we will again by means of a machine that will not tarry on the way, and will travel twice as quick as a cannon ball."

But Gertrude could not recover herself at once. Her voice was broken with sobs; she leaned disconsolately on Fatima's shoulder, and they wept together for some little time.

"Come! come!" said the doctor brusquely. "You are not reasonable, dear child! Kersain is not any farther off because we are looking at the moonlight, or rather the earthlight, without him! He sees us in the same way when the night is fine at Khartoum."

"Do you think he sees us now?" said Gertrude.

"Perhaps he does," evasively answered the doctor, making a sign to stop Norbert from expressing his opinion of the extreme improbability of this being the case.

The idea amused Gertrude, and somewhat diverted her from her grief.

"If he could but know I am here!" she murmured. "I could then fancy that our spirits communed one with the other across the intervening space; and, yet, perhaps, it is best that he should remain in ignorance," she added in a melancholy tone.

"There is something else to see besides the Soudan," cried the doctor, to rouse her. "I see," he continued, "a strip of country down there that looks like France. She comes out well, seated comfortably between the Alps and the Pyrenees, holding out her arms to the Atlantic."

Gertrude looked in the direction her uncle indicated, and saw, to her delight, France, situated between the clearly defined line of Italy and the two little white spots that were the Britannic Isles.

They now returned to the drawing room, as the hour of breakfast had come.

"I really feel cold already!" cried Gertrude, surprised at a fit of shivering, which was now an unusual sensation with her.

"It is cold, and no mistake!" answered the doctor. "I fancy that we stand two or three degrees below zero already; and see! the baronet's teeth are chattering."

"I! The idea!" exclaimed Sir Bucephalus. "I can assure you, my dear doctor," he continued, "I have gone through much worse cold than this. Why, I went up Mont Blanc in nothing warmer than a woollen vest!"

The baronet prided himself on his hardihood, and never wore an overcoat, even in the depth of winter, taking good care, though, to be clothed in flannel from head to foot.

"I congratulate you, my dear sir, if you are impervious to cold," answered the doctor ironically. "I can't flatter myself to that extent, and I own that I should not be sorry to see a good fire, for I am simply frozen."

Just as he finished speaking, his words were suddenly emphasized by a loud report inside the walls.

"What is that?" asked Gertrude.

"Only a stone bursting," replied Norbert simply. "It is freezing hard enough to make the pipes burst, as we say on the earth, and one of our stones, slightly damp still, probably has burst like a shell. Fortunately, there are very few of them in the observatory walls; otherwise we should be treated to a perfect concert of reports. But the pyrite employed in the construction will not burst, for it is perfectly water tight, and almost as ductile as metal."

"Anyhow, we must prepare for severe weather," said the doctor. "If it is as bad as this only an hour after sunset, what will it be in twenty or thirty hours' time! I doubt very much if we shall be able to stand it."

"If it comes to the worst," replied Norbert, "we can but migrate to the sunlit hemisphere. But I hope we shall not be compelled to do so, for judging by the cold when I was there with Kaddour, ten degrees below zero, I think we shall be able to bear the cold here."

"Bear cold ten degrees below zero!" cried the doctor. "You must have graduated at the same school as Sir Bucephalus!"

"Get out two or three hot stones, Virgil," said Norbert; "they will warm us somewhat. Mademoiselle Gertrude had better open her trunk, too, and take out her shawls and mantles."

"I am rather badly off in that respect," said Gertrude. "I did not think I should require much at Suakim and Khartoum."

"Well," answered Norbert, "in that case we must turn out our wardrobes and see if we cannot find some warm coverings for you and Fatima."

But Sir Bucephalus shook his head.

Virgil appeared at this juncture, laden with three enormous stones in a copper basin. They had been heated to a white heat by the solar heat condensers, and buried. They were still very hot, and soon raised the temperature of the drawing room in an appreciable degree.

"What a capital idea!" said the doctor. "It is a great pity that it is not known on earth; when one thinks of all the poor wretches who freeze in winter time, and that if they would only utilize the solar heat they would be warm! Civilization has a great deal to learn yet. They know that the winter is sure to come sooner or later, and yet they do not store up the blessed heat that is showered down upon us so prodigally."

"They do utilize it in the shape of coal, wood, and the other combustibles," said Norbert; "for wood and carbon in their various forms are nothing else but stored up sunshine."

"That is true. But you must own that they might collect it more directly."

"Have I not been the first to prove that fact, since the solar heat brought us here?"

"It was not the best thing to do," said the doctor.

"But it will take us home again, dear doctor."

"Oh, in that case, I shall be most grateful."

CHAPTER XLII.—COLD AND DARKNESS.

DURING the lunar night our friends were oftener together, chatting round the stove filled with hot stones. In spite of all precautions, they felt the cold terribly.

It was all in vain that they collected every bit of available clothing, even making use of the silk stuffs in store in the laboratory. In vain they invented the most fantastic toilets, made of any non conductor of heat they could find.

The doctor even appeared in a suit lined with newspapers. Nothing was of use to keep out the intense cold; and even the baronet could not stop his teeth from chattering.

The strangest thing was that the cold was absolutely independent of atmospheric influence, for there was neither hoar frost nor snow, nor black frost, nor indeed the least breeze astir. The thermometer fell hour by hour below freezing; it fell 20, 25, 30, 35, 40 degrees; but the landscape presented always the same monotonous aspect of silence and desolation, lit up by the pale clear light of the earth.

The fact was easy to explain. The atmosphere of the moon being absolutely free from damp or vapor of any sort, all the attendant phenomena of these varying conditions of the earth's atmosphere were conspicuous by their absence in the moon.

The monotony of the long night was broken from time to time only by the splendid aurora borealis that ever and anon flooded the heavens with gorgeous streamers of blue or purple light, disappearing as suddenly as they had appeared.

Briet had been very anxious at the beginning of the severe weather about his niece. Keeping his fears to himself, he was more than doubtful whether she would be able to bear the intense cold, and in his solicitude neglected nothing to warm and strengthen her. But, to his extreme surprise, he saw at the end of a few days that she bore it better than any of them.

She seemed in fact to be getting stronger. She no longer coughed, and had lost the alarming hectic flush which had caused her father so many anxious, sleepless nights. Never had she appeared in such radiant health as now, and the doctor ventured to hope that the dread malady of consumption had been checked.

"The dry climate of the moon must be the very one for consumptive patients!" said he. "Never did I see so rapid, so extraordinary a cure! Not only has she lost alarming pulmonary symptoms, but her general health is quite restored."

Gertrude threw herself with renewed vigor into the work Norbert had intrusted to her and Fatima. They had to collect all the pieces of silk, and sew them together with strong twist, for the purpose of making a large parachute.

There were many parachutes in the storerooms; but Norbert would have one large enough to hold them all. This entailed making a cage thirty yards in diameter, and would certainly have been a task impossible for Gertrude and her little maid to have executed in the limited time at their disposal, had not Virgil obligingly offered his help. He could sew as well as a sail maker, which is saying a great deal.

Norbert, with the doctor and Kaddour, concerned himself with repairing his great electric magnet. They had enough to do, for the terrible shock had strained the delicate mechanism.

Norbert had to steal hours from his sleep to take the astronomical observations he so prized. He alone, of all the colony, was thoroughly happy, and he would have contentedly borne a much longer night.

Never, he said, had it been given him before to be able to take such precise and fresh observations with so little trouble as to the commencement or end of his operations. A year in such surroundings would be productive of greater results to science than a hundred years of study in the terrestrial atmosphere.

What would it have been had he but some of the powerful telescopes of the great observatories! But he must be content with the means at his disposal. "I should be glad," he continued, "could I but count on five or six lunar nights of fourteen or fifteen times twenty four hours! Nothing more would be needed to place me in the first rank of astronomers."

"Let us stay, then, in that case!" cried Gertrude. "We will willingly make the sacrifice, although it is certainly not inviting."

"The intention is gracious, and I thank you for it. But you know well that it could not be. Our time is strictly limited by our provision of breathable air."

"Then do we start at the dawn of day?"

"Not exactly at dawn, but about forty eight hours after the return of the

sun. That is the minimum of time necessary for the preparations, which can only be made in daylight."

Amid these labors the prisoners were not forgotten. Norbert made a point of being extra kind to them, to make up for their sufferings from the severe cold. He had charged Vigil to see that they had their share of the heat derived from the hot stones, and additional clothing was given them.

Every time Kaddour witnessed these indulgences he was seized with a fresh access of rage that found vent (do what he would to suppress it, out of regard for Norbert) in savage howls and convulsive contortions and grimaces.

Once more Norbert tried to reason him out of his petty rancor. "I have already told you," he would say, "that I will not encourage your feelings of revenge. I do not wish to hear any more on the subject. Why can't you give up this violence? It is so unworthy of your education. Forget it, do, my dear Kaddour, for your own sake and for ours!"

"Forget it, indeed!" replied the dwarf, with inexpressible bitterness. "Let him forget who has not suffered as I have! But as for me, poor despised vagabond, treated everywhere with contumely, the deformed mouser at whose appearance women and little children shudder—how can you expect me to forget? If you could only have one day's experience of my lot during thirty long years, you would then understand my hatred of these wretches!"

"Kaddour," answered Norbert, putting his hand affectionately on the poor dwarf's shoulder, "Kaddour, you will never convince me that you are justified in giving way to your anger. I know you were very cruelly treated by these fellows; but try to be superior to them; show them that they have not been able to degrade your heart! Forgive them! Rise above the sadness of your lot! I know it is hard, but let me have the happiness of seeing you conquer yourself!"

The dwarf looked at him wildly.

"You ask too much!" he cried in a hoarse voice. "I know you are right, but I can't; I can't do it! I am an accursed being who is out of place among respectable men! Leave me to act in accordance with the character they imprinted upon me!"

He wept copiously as he spoke, and hid his face in his hands with a wild gesture of despair.

Norbert saw that he had had some effect upon him, and went on to add:

"Listen, I shall try an experiment. Your hatred is fed chiefly by memory. To accustom you to see your enemies without emotion, I shall permit you to accompany Virgil to the prison, trusting that you will abstain from insulting defenseless men."

From that day forward the dwarf became calmer outwardly. Twice a day he went to the prison with Virgil, and slaked his vengeance by looking at the captives doing their enforced work. This seemed to suffice, for he ceased to talk about them.

The interminable night dragged its weary way along, each hour growing

colder and colder. As the thermometer sank, the buried stones lost their heat, and ceased to affect the temperature. At last the cold was so terribly severe that even Sir Bucephalus could hold out no longer.

"I would give my eyes for a good fire!" cried he, on rising from the dinner table. Every one chorused his wish, and Norbert yielded to the general consensus.

"It is folly on our part," he exclaimed; "but for once we must be foolish. We will have a fire. There is coal in the valley; let us go and fetch it."

In less than ten minutes Virgil and Smith were ready. Seizing some sacks, they reached the valley, with great leaps and brought back a good supply of anthracite from the dried up bed of the torrent. This was heaped up in a hole made for a chimney in the wall of the circular passage, and set on fire.

For two hours they enjoyed themselves thoroughly, roasting their backs and faces, and making tea, and winding up with a dance. It did them all good, and strengthened them to go on bravely to the end.

"Well, we *are* extravagant!" said Norbert, shaking his head. "To think that we have just burned up for our enjoyment the breathing ammunition for twenty four hours!"

Fortunately, the long night was now near its close, and after a little more suffering, during which the thermometer sank two or three degrees lower still, the sun made his appearance in the east, just as they were getting up from dinner.

There was no dawn. A fringe of rays was seen on the horizon, followed by a fragment of disk peeping up as if over a wall. This soon increased in size, and rose into the heavens, tipping all the craters and summits with gold.

The day had come back for three hundred and fifty four hours, and the moment for the return to the earth was near.

CHAPTER XLIII.—A DANGEROUS LOSS.

"COME," cried Norbert, "let us not lose a minute, but do our best to get out of this misery as soon as possible. It will not last long now. I will go at once and overhaul the solar heat condensers and the other machines, and Virgil and Kaddour shall set them going. In forty eight hours, at the latest, we will begin the descent. In six days, eleven hours, and eight minutes, we shall reach the earth!"

"Why," asked Gertrude, "are we to take three hours longer to descend than it took the moon to come down to the earth?"

"Because she is at present farther off from the earth. But first of all we must renew our store of oxygen for this last week. Virgil will do this, while I go on a tour of inspection. Will you come, doctor?"

The doctor assented, and joined Norbert. Gertrude and Sir Bucephalus were glad to accompany them into the welcome warmth of the sunshine after their long deprivation of its cheering rays.

The inspection of the conical mirrors made, they were turning back after their agreeable walk of about twenty minutes, when Virgil suddenly made

his appearance at one of the side doors of the observatory. He was waving his arms, and signaling to his master to hasten.

They both ran up to him.

"A great misfortune has happened, sir!" he exclaimed, as soon as Norbert had come back into the hearing atmosphere of the observatory.

"What is it?"

"The chlorate of potassium!"

"What about it?"

"You know that there were eight barrels full just before the lunar night. Now there is only one."

"How! only one left?"

"I am as much mystified as yourself, but so it is. All the barrels are empty excepting one alone!"

Norbert could not believe his ears. It sounded incredible. He ran to the storeroom, where the barrels had been placed. They were all there, in a row, as he had seen them fourteen days previously. But Virgil had spoken true. All but one gave a hollow sound when struck. They were empty. Some one had stolen seven tons of chlorate, and the prisoners must be the culprits.

It was a terrible situation. One ton of chlorate of potassium could not possibly furnish sufficient oxygen for eight days' consumption.

A cold chill of horror crept over Norbert. Was it to be his fate to see Gertrude suffocated for want of air in this strange world to which he had brought her?

A hundred times no! Anything but that. The prisoners should be put to death, the others placed on rations, rather than that Mademoiselle Kersain should be in want of oxygen for a single minute!

Followed by Kaddour and Vigil, Norbert went to the prison (where the commissioners received him without a word), and proceeded to make a thorough search throughout the building.

"Seven tons of chlorate of potassium," said he, "are not a trifle, and it could no be very easy to hide them!"

The walls were sounded, the floor taken up in ever so many places. But all in vain; no chlorate was to be found.

Then they searched all about. The circular passage, the storerooms, the whole observatory were examined with the help of the electric light and the pickaxe and hammer. They could find no trace of chlorate.

Yet it was impossible that it could have been used up, or have evaporated. There had been no heat for fourteen times twenty four hours. Besides, how could the prisoners have managed to carry out such an operation?

Norbert and the doctor felt a growing suspicion stealing over them. Was it possible that Kaddour—— But, no, the thought was too odious. The dwarf must, in that case, be a very monster of hypocrisy. The whole tenor of his behavior since the castaways had admitted him to their intimacy militated against such a supposition. Norbert would not entertain the idea for a moment.

Kaddour himself seemed to have a kind of intuition that he was being suspected, and was naturally therefore more upset than any one about their

loss. He ran about the observatory, looking frantically for the chlorate everywhere; and his very excitement increased the suspicions of the others.

He divined their thoughts, and on a sudden he thus addressed Norbert:

"The thief is either I or Wagner, the leader of the three scoundrels. If I cannot prove that it is Wagner I will blow my brains out!"

"Why take things so violently, my dear Kaddour?" answered the young astronomer. "I shall only be too glad if you succeed in proving the guilt of Wagner."

"Then let me question him before you."

"Be it so. Let us return to the prison."

As they went along Kaddour explained how the ex commissioner might have got into the storeroom during the night through their air hole. No one else would have stolen the chlorate; they alone were capable of doing so.

"To what end?" asked Norbert.

"We shall soon find that out."

Kaddour was not mistaken—at all events on this point. Wagner did not deny his guilt. He even boasted of it.

"I did not tell you just now," he said with a jeer, "because you did not ask me. If, instead of sounding the walls and looking under the flooring, you had deigned to question me I would have told you!"

Such insolence of demeanor was insufferable.

"And may I ask you," cried Norbert, "how and why you have committed this theft?"

"That is our secret. Why? I will tell you why. We are tired of being kept in a cage, working like niggers for no practical end. I looked about for some way of forcing you to set us at liberty, and I have found it. Either admit us instantly to your society, or you will go without chlorate!"

"Enough!" cried Norbert. "Come, Kaddour, I shall consider what had better be done."

He went out, rather relieved to find that the chlorate of potassium was not irrevocably lost. If the worst came to the worst, they could but accept the conditions laid down by the scoundrels.

If only himself were concerned, he would of a certainty have made short work of them and their threats. But the safety of Gertrude was at stake!

"Well, Kaddour, what would you do in my place?" asked Norbert, on his return to the drawing room, where only the doctor, Sir Bucephalus, and Virgil awaited him.

"I should accept their conditions, and when they had restored the stolen goods I would shoot the scoundrels!" said the dwarf, without a moment's hesitation.

"That may be the tactics of the Soudan, but they are not mine," replied Norbert. "My poor Kaddour," he continued, "why are you always so blinded by hatred as to lose all sense of honor?"

Kaddour bent his head at the reproach, but after a minute he said, "In that case, we must find the chlorate without the assistance of the villains. Will you give me a pickaxe and an electric lamp?"

"Willingly. Take all that you need. I shall be only too pleased if you succeed."

Kaddour equipped himself, and, taking a store of oxygen, sallied forth.

"Where is he going?" they all wondered. "Does he suppose that the prisoners could have buried seven tons of chlorate in the ground?"

It seemed a ridiculous idea.

CHAPTER XLIV.—THE STOLEN CHLORATE.

At the end of an hour the dwarf returned.

"The chlorate of potassium is at the bottom of the crater of Reticus," he said. "Those villains took it in sacks, and threw it down the opening of the well that supplies us with air. I have found it all in a heap underneath the well. I opened the crater, and after a thorough examination closed it again."

"Can it be possible that you have not made a mistake, Kaddour?" cried Norbert, scarcely daring to believe the good news.

"Here is the proof," continued the dwarf, taking out of his pocket a handful of chlorate of potassium, which he laid on the table.

There was no gainsaying the fact now. After warm congratulations on his discovery, they took counsel together concerning the fate to be awarded the three criminals.

"What is your opinion, doctor?" asked Norbert. "What ought to be done with these wretches, under the circumstances?"

"It is an atrocious crime," said the doctor, "and on board ship it would be visited most certainly with death. It is, perhaps, rather more heinous, under existing circumstances. I am not a man of violence, and it is very much against the grain to have to utter such a verdict. But the scoundrels deserve the worst."

"And what do you say, Sir Bucephalus?"

"There cannot be two opinions about it," peremptorily replied the baronet. "These villains are a permanent source of danger. Fraud and treachery are their favorite weapons, and it is useless to expect either gratitude or repentance from them. I vote for their death."

"And you, Kaddour?"

"Death is too good for them—that is all I have to say."

"And you, Virgil?"

"Indeed, sir," said the brave Algerian, "I have seen many a poor wretch of a soldier shot for not a quarter of what these villains have done."

"What do you say?"

"Death."

Norbert was silent and thoughtful. He was, perhaps, about to indorse the verdict of his companions, when Gertrude opened the door. She had come to fetch her work—some cloth slippers she was embroidering in spare moments for her dear father.

"Pardon me!" she said. "I am afraid I am disturbing you. You all look like conspirators, sitting round the table."

The agitating crisis of affairs had been kept secret from her. Not one of the five judges could shake off his stern mood sufficiently so as to answer her back as lightly as she spoke. Gertrude was slightly affronted at this unaccustomed want of courtesy.

"I shall go," she said. "I can see that I am not wanted!"

She disappeared. But she left behind her, as it were, the "gentle dew of mercy," and Norbert could not resist its influence.

"It is too horrible to think of putting these men to death when she is by," he thought. Then aloud: "My dear friends, there is one difficulty (which has perhaps also occurred to you) in the way of executing summary justice on these criminals. We stand in the position of being at the same time both judges and prosecutors in the case. I cannot but own for my part that we have the strongest personal interest in their death, inasmuch as it would lessen the consumption of oxygen, and consequently increase the amount of our breathing gas."

"It appears to me that this is sufficient to render our sentence invalid. It is true that these men have deserved death; but that does not give us the right to be their executioners. I propose, therefore, to grant them a respite, and take them before an impartial tribunal on earth."

The doctor, the baronet, and Virgil agreed. But Kaddour screamed aloud, and nearly choked with anger.

"I quite understand, and, to a certain extent, sympathize with your feelings," said Norbert to him. "But it is settled. The prisoners shall have the benefit of a respite. All that I can do for you, my dear Kaddour, is to put them under your surveillance, as well as under that of Virgil, but I forbid you to ill treat them in any way, or even to speak to them at all. You have only to see that they do not go beyond the limits of the prison."

"I'll take good care of that!" cried the dwarf, his eyes aflame with disappointed anger. "I shall begin by walling up all the openings, and leave them only just enough space to breathe through."

"That is precisely what I term an unnecessarily hard measure," said Norbert. "Wall up by all means, but not more than is needful."

A. Laurie.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A STUDY IN BLUE.

THE sky is just as blue, today,
As when I used to meet her
Down in the lane. No bud of May
Was more unspoiled or sweeter.

And she is still as fair, they say—
Would that her heart were truer!—
The sky is just as blue, today,
But I'm a great deal bluer!

A TALE OF TWO HOTELS.

The memorable experience of a Bostonian couple on a visit to New York—Lengths to which the imagination will run when once it sees an opportunity to slip its leash.

M^{R.} and Mrs. Jack lived in Boston. They had not been long married, and although Jack was the kindest and most attentive of husbands, Mrs. Jack would sometimes wonder what kind of adventures her handsome partner had had before she knew him.

She felt that outside of her little sphere, which was eminently respectable, there was a dreadfully wicked world. The papers reported domestic scandals enough to show her that, although her life was a perfect calm, there was a wild whirl around her that filled her with consternation. What if her husband were leading a double life, such as she read of every day or two?

At a ball last winter Jack had danced twice with that handsome widow Wood, and since then had she not noticed a gleam of intelligence pass between them when they met.

When Jack's business kept him late, why should she think at once of that odious widow? When Jack had been called to New York once she could not keep from walking past the widow's house to see if she was still in town.

One evening at dinner her husband announced: "My dear, I am obliged to go to New York tomorrow."

"Why not take me? You've always promised me the trip."

"Why, my child, I must spend my time in dusty offices, and I wouldn't know what to do with you."

"Well, I ought to see the dentist, and you've always said that no one but your old friend Plomb should ever touch my teeth; and after we are through we could drive in the park and go to the theater and have a lovely time."

Of course that settled it, and the next afternoon they took the train.

Mrs. Jack was startled to see a familiar figure enter the next car. It was only a glimpse, but it did look very like that horrid widow. She did not see her again, however, and soon forgot the incident.

Mr. and Mrs. Jack registered at the Imperial Hotel. They dined in their room, and retired early the better to enjoy the morrow's pleasures.

After breakfast they called a cab, and Jack left his wife at the dentist's and drove down town, agreeing to meet her in the parlor of the Imperial at one o'clock.

Mrs. Jack looked very pretty as she sat in the parlor waiting for her husband. Her color was, perhaps, a little higher than usual, for it was after two o'clock and Jack had not yet put in an appearance, and she was annoyed and angry; more than that, she was vulgarly hungry.

Three o'clock and no husband. "If I had some money, I'd eat alone," she thought.

A brilliant idea! She caught a bell boy who was passing and sent word to the office that Mrs. Jack of Boston wished five dollars.

"We don't know the lady," came back the answer.

Mrs. Jack felt mortified enough to cry.

Self preservation is the first law of nature, and Mrs. Jack did not propose to die of starvation. She wrote on one of her cards: "Dear Doctor, Jack has been detained down town and I am famished; please send me five dollars." Calling a bell boy, she despatched him with this missive to the dentist, with instructions to bring an answer.

It was about six o'clock. Mrs. Jack had spent the time staring out of the window in hopes of seeing her missing husband. What a beastly day she had had, instead of the one of pleasure she had anticipated.

"I wonder if he's been run over," she sobbed, as the idea occurred to her, and visions of her husband's athletic form nicely quartered by the cable car floated before her. The idea was too harrowing and she threw herself upon a sofa and cried heartily.

"My dear, you are in trouble; can't I help you," said a kind, motherly voice, and looking up, Mrs. Jack saw a neat looking old lady bending over her.

"My husband is lost; do you think he's been run over?"

"Don't worry, my dear; he has been detained on business, no doubt."

"But it is after six o'clock, and people don't work so late, even in those dingy law offices," she sobbed.

"I beg your pardon, but does your husband drink?" asked the old lady.

Now there had been just one spot on the little woman's domestic horizon, and the old lady had laid it bare.

Shortly after their marriage some of Jack's bachelor friends had called in the evening and they had emptied the decanter drinking to Jack's happiness. Jack, who seldom touched spirits, was quite ill after they left, and his wife cried herself to sleep.

"I've married a drunkard," she thought, "and it won't be long before he'll come home and break up the furniture and beat me—maybe murder me." Jack had been dreadfully penitent the next day, and she had never seen him indulge since.

She began to be uneasy, but determined that the stranger should not see it.

"My husband does not drink," she answered, somewhat unsteadily.

"With such a pretty little wife as you, he surely would have eyes for no other woman," continued the comforter.

"Oh, that widow! I'm sure she came down on the same train," thought Mrs. Jack. "To think that Jack would treat me so. I never want to see him again. I shall go right home and pack up and leave him forever."

"I wish I had never seen the Imperial Hotel," she said aloud.

"Why, have you been over to the Imperial?" asked the old lady.

"Over to the Imperial? Isn't this the Imperial?" gasped Mrs. Jack.

"No, my dear; this is Grand. The Imperial is similarly located, but a block further up Broadway. I've no doubt you will find your husband waiting there for you."

* * * * *

Jack hurried through his business and arrived at the Imperial just before one. His wife had not returned. At two he felt pretty hungry, so he lighted a cigar to check his appetite.

Three and four o'clock and still no wife. "Where in thunder can she be," thought Jack. "I never noticed any inclination to be gay about my wife," he ruminated; "but there are always fascinating young fellows hanging around these large hotels, ready to begin a flirtation at a moment's notice."

The idea of his innocent little wife in the hands of one of these birds of prey caused cold chills to run up his spine.

"I'll shoot the fellow on sight," he muttered, regardless of the fact that he did not possess a gun.

Almost frantic, he jumped into a cab and drove around to the dentist's office to inquire when his wife had left there.

He had to wait some time in the reception room, but his turn came in due course—a few days, it seemed to him—and he walked into the doctor's office to be greeted as follows:

"You are a villain, Jack. How could you bring your young wife to New York and go off with the boys and leave her to starve all day?"

"I have been waiting since one o'clock for my wife at the Imperial," replied Jack.

"You are a liar, Jack, and I have no patience with you. I received a note from your wife an hour ago, and she has been waiting all day at the hotel for you, and she had to send to me for money to get something to eat."

"Come with me to the hotel and I'll prove that there is a mistake somewhere," said Jack.

Mrs. Jack, the doctor, and Jack arrived in the hotel parlor about the same time. Explanations followed.

Mr. and Mrs. Jack took the first train for home. Neither had any desire for gaiety; they had had enough excitement for one day.

Mrs. Jack has never since expressed a desire to visit New York, nor has she ever mentioned the widow. Jack has never spoken of hotel flirts.

John B. Hawes.

LOVE'S DAY.

WHEN is love's day? Is it May,
 With flowerets springing, meadows gay,
 And song birds trilling many a lay?
 Nay; my heart says 'tis today.
 Trees are leafless, skies are gray,
 But love, dear love, has come my way!

Alma Pendexter Hayden.